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ABSTRACT

This report presents stories, written by teachers in the northwestern United States, about their experiences with curriculum over the years. The stories come from several groups, including four teachers who wrote as individuals, one pair of close colleagues, and one interview with a team of educators. The teachers responded to questions about how their curriculum experiences affected their convictions about student learning; how their convictions affected their teaching; how curriculum helped them grow as teachers; what happened to change their understandings and philosophies during their teaching; and how the changes influenced their students. Several common themes grew out of the stories. One of the universal themes was the growing awareness of the impact of students themselves on curriculum. The support and encouragement of other teachers and administrators was essential to several teachers' change processes. Teachers identified time as a major factor in their explorations of curriculum and their process of change. Self-awareness was another universal theme. Several stories showed the effects of modeling on teachers and students. Teachers noted working on cooperative teams as a major challenge that they faced. Teachers' thinking was stretched by the influence of students whose experiences and cultural backgrounds differed from their own. After an introduction by Barbara Wallace, the stories include: "If they can say Stegosaurus..." (Teri Houghton); The Power of Reflection (Gail Gilchrist); Choosing the Road Less Traveled (Susan Seaman); Navigating Sameness (Karen Mitchell); On Change as a Constnat: An Interview with a Curriculum Development Team (Jane Braunger); and Caution: Women at Work (Margaret Marsh and Linda Kidd). (SM)

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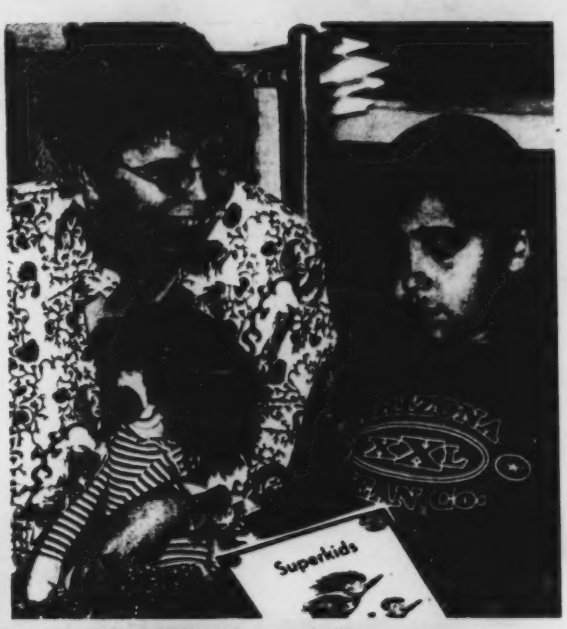
Teacher Stories

OF CURRICULUM CHANGE



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Edited by Barbara Wallace and Jane Braunger

June 1998

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Introduction

Barbara Wallace

> "Once you start asking yourself how it might be different, change starts to creep in, risks and all."
>
> —Elizabeth Jones

From the time we start thinking of teaching, through our degree programs, student teaching, and into our years of experience, we develop and change our understandings or beliefs about what good teaching is, about how students best learn, and about our role in the world of education. There are multiple factors that influence our beliefs as we begin our teaching careers. We bring to teaching our own family backgrounds and cultural points of view, individual experiences with education, readings and discussions in classes, and our interactions with students when we develop and try out our own theories. As we begin to teach we discover that our views have a direct impact on our teaching styles and practices in the classroom.

Teachers' beliefs about good teaching are often influenced by curriculum itself. On a daily basis, teachers interpret and share curriculum with their students. In addition, many educators serve on district teams responsible for developing and implementing curriculum, for example, as part of a pilot project. Conferences and workshops, graduate courses, and current educational research are but a few of the influences on teachers' perceptions and uses of curriculum in their classrooms. In turn, teachers' evolving understanding of curriculum can bring about improvements in their classroom practice and growth in professional understandings.

As we began to take a closer look at the interaction of belief and practice, we asked teachers: How have your curriculum experiences affected your convictions about student learning, and, in turn, how have these convictions affected your teaching? How has curriculum helped you grow as a teacher? We wanted to know what happened to change educators' understandings and philosophies during their teaching. We also asked how these changes influenced the students in their classrooms. It is by examining these questions, by seeking the answers, and by being reflective practitioners that teachers become the researchers that they must be, putting into practice what experience teaches them to believe.

Teachers can be constant researchers as they work with students and with one another. So we went directly to the source and invited several teachers to write or talk with us about their experiences with

curriculum over the years. Four of the teachers wrote as individuals, one story comes from a pair of close colleagues, and one is taken from an interview with a group of educators working as a team. Geographically they represent the northwestern United States, including Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Oregon.

In our questions, we didn't define curriculum for the writers. For many teachers, curriculum began as the prescribed material they were supposed to inspire students to learn. An underlying concept throughout this collection is the variety of ways teachers identify or define curriculum. How the teachers viewed curriculum set the parameters for what was included in these stories of educational change. The educators who have written for this collection draw in multiple influences in the classroom and name the combined experience "curriculum." We hear stories that interweave curricular experiences with student, parental, and collegial interactions in such a way that they are inseparable, recognizing that nothing in classrooms happens in isolation.

One of the universal themes in this collection is the growing awareness of the impact of the students themselves on curriculum.

Several common themes come through in these stories, although they were written about different age groups, subject matter, and locations. These common strands may reflect important values or issues about learning in our culture.

One of the universal themes in this collection is the growing awareness of the impact of the students themselves on curriculum. Gail Gilchrist identifies the students' questions and involvement as essential to generating the questions that sparked change. Karen Mitchell describes how students became partners in the design of relevant, ongoing curriculum as well as assessment. Susan Seaman notes how she developed different processes for instruction as well as creating or revising material as she watched her students thrive on success in new situations. Another key area of transition for some of these teachers is identifying and building on each student's individual strengths, goals, and achievement, with student input. Many teachers were taught a grading system that didn't look at individual understanding and grow from there, but rather identified a student's place in the group as a fixed evaluation. Educators and students may not have been comfortable with this, but it was a system everyone understood. Teri Hougton describes how she was able to shift from grading students' writing to responding to it and helping students make quality revision decisions for themselves.

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The support and encouragement of other teachers and administrators was essential to several teachers' process of change, including Susan Seaman, Gail Gilchrist, Margaret Marsh, and Linda Kidd. Their colleagues' encouragement to risk looking at curriculum in new ways was both freeing and challenging. It supported teachers in seeing themselves as learners, and valued their expanding understanding of education. These teachers met in hallways and at lunch or after school to share stories of success and frustration, to ask one another questions, and to offer alternative ways to reach students. All teachers share stories of classroom practice; these teachers went beyond this to create a research base of their own practice, from which they explored new areas to improve learning and teaching. They tried what worked with other classes and demonstrated their own excitement about the successes they had.

Time was identified as a major factor in teachers' explorations of curriculum and in their process of change. It takes us time to identify the conflicts in our days as questions; to recognize the questions that drive us to make changes; to explore other options; to meet with others as we share ideas, frustrations, and support; to try new ways, new materials, and new processes; to evaluate and refine; and to begin the cycle again. Educators who were given this time as part of their contract days noticed the positive impact on their teaching in the short run and in their continued explorations throughout their careers. Susan Seaman notes that being given the time to explore teaching practices and options as part of the regular day says that we are valued as teachers and as individuals, and that seeking new ways to improve teaching is important to administrators, parents, and the general public. The implicit message of giving people time to exchange knowledge is that this exploration itself is important. The Spokane social studies teachers comment that providing this time creates a model of learning that is readily transferred to classrooms, where it has a direct impact on students.

One of the most important gifts of the process of reflection on our own teaching is self-knowledge. Gail Gilchrist describes how her awareness of her own needs as a learner led to deeper thinking about meeting students' learning needs. Once we have done this with ourselves, it is easier to lead others through it. The importance of each person knowing how he or she learns best becomes part of the study of curriculum and planning for a year's course of study. When students know how they organize knowledge in their own minds, it becomes easier for them to categorize and practice in ways that will incorporate new learning into their lives.

Several of the stories show us the effects of modeling on teachers and students. What affects us impacts our pupils. In Margaret Marsh and Linda Kidd's story, an influential administrator serves as a role

model for rethinking their literacy instruction. And Teri Houghton writes about how she modeled the use of writing traits for students. When there are changes in teachers' classroom behavior and planning, new knowledge is passed on to students. As these writers examined their own teaching and learning styles, they began to model reflective practices. Teachers started to involve students in thinking about their own education on a more intrapersonal level. Teaching students to see education as an internal, individualized process began to develop their critical-thinking skills. It created a forum for discussing education in a larger sense, outside their daily trials and successes. By modeling reflective practice, teachers demonstrated that learning is a lifelong activity to be shared and treasured.

One of the challenges and ultimate successes for teachers is the growing expectation that they will work as cooperative teams to focus on educational topics. The Spokane social studies teachers shared the tensions and growth as they developed a new curriculum together, becoming a team in the process. Working together as part of a team and learning to collaborate is new territory for many classroom teachers. And yet, teachers have been asked to help students learn collaboratively. How to model this for students while simultaneously experiencing it firsthand is a current dilemma for teachers.

Teachers' thinking is stretched by the influence of students whose experiences and cultural backgrounds differ from that of the teachers. As they see students with differences as individuals and allow the shared experience to include learning from these students, teachers expand their knowledge as well as their vision of how to make connections for everyone involved in education. Inclusion becomes more than tolerance of a variety of students: It transforms a classroom into the sum of all the aspects of the individuals sharing information. Students begin to learn as much from one another as they do from the teacher, changing the teacher's role from a disseminator of information to a facilitator of experiences.

These stories introduce us to teachers who are reflective practitioners. These are people who look twice at what is happening in their classrooms and, by asking the hard questions, seek answers that will lead them and their students in positive directions through changes in beliefs and practices. We hope you will recognize yourself in some cases, find additional resources, and enjoy the shared journeys of these educators.

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"If they can say Stegosaurus..."

Teri Houghton

When I enrolled in a college course called "Teaching Composition," I expected to learn strategies to help my future students become better writers. What was the text? *Transformational Grammar*. Grammar! I spent the term trying to figure out how spending 12 weeks doing assignments in a grammar book would help me learn how to become a writing teacher. I never did. I did decide, though, that I was a good writer. I had an instinctive grasp of grammatical conventions that was reinforced by grammar instruction I had received in elementary school, junior high, high school, and now in college. But I still couldn't make the connection between isolated grammar instruction and improving my writing skills, or helping others become better writers.

As a new teacher, I found myself unarmed when it came to determining an approach to writing instruction for my students. Faced with six classes of eighth- through twelfth-grade students, some of whom struggled to write a coherent sentence, let alone an essay, I was stumped. We had a literature anthology and a writing book. In the days of a textbook-based curriculum, those were the foundation for my English program.

My professional preparation had given me tools to work with my students who were reluctant readers, but the only material I had for writing instruction was the text. What did I find when I opened it to the table of contents? Grammar. Almost three-quarters of the book was dedicated to grammar drills. Oh, there were writing assignments tucked in here and there, but most of the book was packed with fill-in-the-blank—was/were, is/are grammar assignments. The last quarter of the book addressed writing in a more direct way. There were sections on writing paragraphs, complete with fill-in-the-blank paragraph formulas, formulas to follow for writing about cause/effect relationships, using chronological organization, and rules for proper punctuation. There were ample exercises and activities to fill a year's worth of instruction. Eventually, the literary favorites (often the teacher's, not the students') were read and discussed, written about and graded. The last part was the hardest.

Teacher preparation courses neglected to mention grading student writing. The lucky teachers had received some guidance during their student teaching. I was not one of the lucky ones. So, when I graded my students' assignments, I followed the model I knew from my own experience: A/B/C/D/F. Most of my students seemed comfortable with the system, but I was not. The problems became obvious when

a student approached me with a C on a paper and asked some tough questions: "Why did I get a C?" followed by, "What do I need to do to get an A?"

I had, in my mind, a model of what an "A" paper for that assignment should encompass, but I struggled to find the words to explain it to that student. Instead, we went through his paper line by line, paragraph by paragraph, discussing its strengths and weaknesses. I had other students with beautiful penmanship who could write technically correct papers—perfect spelling, grammar, punctuation—and still skirt around a topic without saying anything substantial in their papers. These students had trouble understanding why *their* papers earned a C when there was "nothing wrong." We would spend a great deal of time looking at the ideas they expressed and the ways in which their papers were (or were not) organized. In an attempt to address this disparity and acknowledge that there is more to writing than just an A or a C, I joined many of my fellow teachers who gave dual grades, one for Content, one for Mechanics. Still, students walked away without a clear understanding of what they needed to do to make their writing better. It was a frustrating experience for all of us.

Several years ago at a workshop I became acquainted with a writing assessment system which identified six areas or traits that describe attributes of good writing. Finally, a system where we could respond to students' papers in terms of separate elements that, together, make a good piece of writing. It made such sense to me. It seemed so clear!

I was eager to try this assessment system in my classroom. I began scoring my students' papers using the six traits (Ideas and Content, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions)—the five-point (now six) scale. When my students wrote papers, I read them, put numerical scores in the appropriate blanks on the scoring sheet, and returned their papers to them. The problems surfaced immediately. "What do these numbers mean?" "What is Conventions?" "What is my grade?" I had forgotten a step. I understood what I was doing, what the numbers meant. I could even convert them to a grade for the sake of our report cards. But I had forgotten to share that knowledge with my students. What followed in the next few years was the evolution of a system to not only evaluate my students' writing, but to merge an assessment system with an instructional system.

Trial and error convinced me that introducing and concentrating on one trait at a time made the most sense. I told my students that this was the *Trait of the Month Club*. It gave them time to learn the language, the vocabulary in the scoring guide, one concept at a time. This allowed them time to see strong models and relate the language and the concepts introduced in each trait to the strengths in those

models. We also spent time looking at models that were weak in the trait we were emphasizing. This gave students the opportunity to not only identify the weaknesses, but to suggest changes to improve the flaws. Ultimately, this was a key. Having a common vocabulary allowed students to focus on the characteristics and qualities of the writing in a way that was precise, descriptive, and that the rest of us understood. It helped to clarify the qualities of good writing for my students and for me, and to illustrate steps they could take to improve their own writing.

One introductory approach I tried with my students was to give each writing group (conveniently there were six) a trait, the scoring guide language (simplified), poster board, magazines, markers, glue, and an assignment to make a poster that demonstrated the key concepts, words, and phrases embodied in their trait. These would later be laminated and put up around the room for reference. My students had a great time! The poster for Organization had magazine cutouts of scenes like a military marching band in action. The Word Choice poster was filled with labeled and non-labeled visual images. Ideas and Content featured a picture of a box filled with detailed toys. As we introduced each new trait, the writing group that had produced the poster was called upon to share its poster and explain its relationship to the concepts and language in the scoring guide. Similar posters have been designed and displayed in other classrooms to remind students of key words and concepts in the various writing modes. My students referred to the posters periodically as they worked in their writing groups. They were quick, easy reminders of key concepts that should be considered during their conferences and revision sessions.

Having a common vocabulary ... helped to clarify the qualities of good writing for my students and for me, and to illustrate steps they could take to improve their own writing.

Introducing and concentrating on one trait at a time also gave my students (and me!) a chance to look in depth at the good, the bad, and the ugly examples of each trait. It gave them the time they needed to internalize each concept and make it work in their own writing. I made extensive use of samples of student writing, but (at least in the beginning) I did not use work from students in my class. I have found that the use of "anonymous" authors allowed my students to be more honest in their comments. Instead of "I don't get this story" or "I like your story. It's nice," I began to hear comments like, "The details are all out of order. I can't tell what happens first. If he had used some transitions it would help" and "The first paragraph is really focused. It held my attention and made me want to read the rest."

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My classes saw example after example of student work that was strong in whatever trait was our current focus. Eventually, they could see the language in the scoring guide reflected in the examples we read and discussed. One important source for examples, I believe, is the teacher's own writing. I made the transition from anonymous student writing to using my own students' papers for discussion by showing them my own pre-writing, rough drafts, and revised drafts. When they began a new assignment, I also began writing. I will admit that I did not always write with my students, but when we were covering new ground or I wanted to make a particular point, I tried to do it through personal example. My students gradually made the transition from working with anonymous authors to teacher-writer and finally to their fellow student-authors. Eventually they were able to be as specific, objective, and supportive with their peers as they had been with the writing of others. They were able to give and receive comments the way they were intended, as constructive, positive input.

> Their focus was clearly on helping their partners improve their writing.

As the year progressed, I was able to spend more class time as an observer during writing group conferences. It was exciting to eavesdrop on a revision conference when students were making comments like, "Your Voice is really strong here, but it's not all the way through. It's a little mechanical toward the end" and "Your Conventions are really strong, probably a five, but you need to look again at Organization. If you added transitions that helped me understand how much time passed, it would make this part clearer." Eventually this practice transferred to their own writing. If we worked in class on Organization, for example, and students focused on strong introductions and conclusions and the use of transitions as we discussed and revised classroom examples and as targets in their peer conferences, more engaging introductions and effective transitions began to appear regularly in their own writing. My students had reached a point where they began to internalize what we had been practicing in class. Colleagues of mine who were also working with analytical traits began to have similar experiences in their classrooms.

One day an elementary colleague expressed concern about the complex language of the scoring guide. She was convinced that third-grade students would trip and stumble over the terminology. How, she wondered, could we expect little third-graders to deal with words like *skeletal organization* and *transitions*. She expressed concern that these young students would have difficulty relating some of the terminology in the scoring guide to their writing. Another colleague overheard the concerns. Her reply was simple, but convincing: "If they can say Stegosaurus, they can say skeletal!" The fact is, elementary students handle the scoring guide language quite well. If

they are given examples and shown models to illustrate the language in the scoring guide, they can relate those concepts to their own writing. If second- and third-graders can understand that a dinosaur with four legs was a quadruped, and that if it had sharp teeth it was probably a carnivore, they can certainly understand what we mean by an engaging beginning and satisfying conclusion and that both are important components of the trait of Organization.

Last year I worked with students in a fourth- and-fifth-grade blended classroom. They were working with personal experience narratives, so I brought one I had written as an example, to show the students what my revisions looked like. I wanted to make the point that writing is not always a neat and tidy process and that it was okay to use arrows and scribbles in the draft process to make changes and improvements. We looked at three drafts and discussed changes I had made in each, then looked at my newest version. I finally shared with them what I thought was my final draft. We read it aloud, looked at it on the overhead, and discussed changes I had made since the previous version, particularly changes I had made in the ending. I explained why I had made the revisions, and what I hoped the reader would understand after reading my paper. I was surprised when the class began to make further suggestions for changes they thought would improve my paper. We discussed and considered several suggestions and I ultimately agreed that one suggestion in particular would make my ending much clearer and more effective than the version I had written. The next day I brought my newest "final draft" and we decided that their suggestions had indeed improved my paper.

On later reflection, I realized that these students truly had an understanding of Word Choice and Organization, the focus of that day's discussion. They were able to use the concepts and the language in the scoring guide and apply them to my narrative. They had seen that their comments would be considered and honored as honest, constructive comments, and incorporated into my writing if I, as author, agreed that they improved my writing. They had seen that the author's feelings would not be hurt if they commented on the writing. They observed ways to make positive observations and constructive criticism using language and concepts taken from the scoring guide. They had seen an improved final product and had received gratitude from a writer for their help in the process.

In the days that followed I watched and listened as they carried the same understanding into their peer editing conferences and their own writing. Students were able to be critically supportive of their writing partners. In their peer conferences, students read their papers to their partners. They listened and took notes as their writing partners asked clarifying questions and offered advice. I eavesdropped as they discussed suggestions, weighed advice, and made decisions about

their own writing. The confidence and level of seriousness these young writers demonstrated impressed me. Their focus was clearly on helping their partners improve their writing. They could focus on the strengths they noticed and suggest improvements that focused on the *writing*, the *product*, not the author. They had moved beyond the fear of hurting someone's feelings. They knew that the comments were derived from the language and concepts in the scoring guide and were intended to improve the paper, not hurt the feelings of the author. What a powerful piece of knowledge for children to possess!

So, I ask myself, what does all this tell me about my insights about teaching and learning? I have, perhaps, refocused some of my beliefs. I have long thought that students need to be active participants in the learning process. I am beginning to define more clearly what this means for me and for my students. They need—they *deserve*—clear models, clear directions, solid examples, and clearly defined targets. I now have a way to show my students what an exemplary narrative (or a persuasive or expository paper...) should look like. They have that clear target. And they are learning the tools and skills to reach it. They no longer wait for the "cosmic teacher" to put a grade on their papers so they can take them home and put them on the fridge. They have a process, a vocabulary, the experience, and the skills to become active participants in their own growth as writers. They don't have to wait for me to score their papers. In their writing groups, with their peers, they can take an active role in their own growth as writers. Students evaluate their own writing, identifying their strengths and areas that need further work. They have the knowledge and vocabulary to use in setting personal goals, and the skills and experience they need to help reach their goals are in place.

Students need good, clear models—lots of them. Whether they are learning long division or how to construct an inviting introductory paragraph, they need to see what a successful effort looks like.

I wish I could have followed my students into their college classes or into the workplace to see how these skills transferred to other arenas. I do know from my students who have reported on their college experiences that the evaluative skills and experiences in analyzing their own work was of great value to them. Their professors expected them to be self-monitoring and to possess the skills they needed to set goals and work toward them systematically. The work with their peers in writing groups and in using the analytical scoring guides gave them a level of experience and confidence that transferred to Writing 121. I suspect my students who approached their futures through avenues other than college faced similar expectations from their supervisors at work. I hope they were able to meet those expectations with an equal degree of confidence. In my current

role, I am beginning to see this philosophy edge over into other areas. Students need good, clear models—lots of them. Whether they are learning long division or how to construct an inviting introductory paragraph, they need to see what a successful effort looks like. They need time, practice, and experience. They need to experiment and to evaluate their own efforts. Students who are involved in this process *do* become more active participants in their own learning. They have the tools to do so. The more clearly expectations are expressed for students, the greater their chances are for meeting them. I see the beginnings in math, as students practice and learn the language of the Problem Solving Scoring Guide. For ages, students have been writing equations for story problems and making marginal sketches and diagrams as part of problem-solving strategies, but without a strong focus on their use as part of the problem-solving process. As students learn to use this process to solve problems in a more systematic manner, as they become more active participants in the process, they and their teachers have a great deal to gain.

I clearly remember the day when a student of mine told me how she felt about this "new writing stuff." She wanted me to know that she really liked this new approach to writing instruction and assessment. "This shows me what I can do, not just what I can't do," she told me. And she said that now she could see what she needed to do to become a better writer. In my words, she had a clear target and was learning the skills she needed to be able to reach it. She was enthusiastic and encouraged, and so am I.

The Power of Reflection

Gail Gilchrist

These days, my living situation is more the norm than unique. I am a 41-year-old, divorced mother of three. I was caught in the middle of the era when, unquestionably, "good mothers" stayed at home to raise their children. I was able to stay home with my first two children for the first year of their lives. However, finances were difficult at best, and I began to question my decision to marry at the age of 18 instead of going to college. I had been a serious student all through school, yet had squeaked by with Cs and an occasional B. I knew I was an intelligent person. Why then did I feel so unequipped to be a self-supporting, productive member of the world in which I found myself?

At age 31, I determined to learn how to answer the questions that kept coming up about my life. I went to a junior college, 45 miles from my home in rural Montana, for three years to earn my A.A. in education. To complete my college degree and earn my teaching certificate, I moved to Missoula to attend the University of Montana.

Reentering school was an incredible growth experience. I realized I had many gaps in areas of understanding, in large part due to the lack of stimulating high school learning experiences. It became clear to me that this was a result of not having been allowed to take charge of my learning or, most of all, to discover myself as a learner. I spent many hours reflecting about the varied experiences that made me who I was and shaped my self-concept. My life experiences, hardships included, increased my tenacity to delve into and understand what made the difference for teachers who made important connections and created enthusiasm in learners. Why did I look back on my education and feel I was only marginally intelligent and not very successful in a school setting? I wanted to know what keeps people asking questions and seeking answers, and what shuts down the desire and thirst to know more about the world.

As an adult student I reacted positively to the way in which my college professors set up a learning environment and outlined their expectations. I was now able to see that in many of my previous classroom experiences, my individual needs as a learner had not been addressed. I had not viewed myself as intelligent because my way of constructing knowledge had not been valued. It became clear to me that certain conditions need to be present to enable me to become an uninhibited and motivated participant in the learning arena:

1. Instructors need to welcome and encourage my questions and responses as I construct my own meaning. When they do, my level of engagement soars.
2. Expectations need to be clear to me; I need a variety of options to solve problems presented.
3. I need time for processing and reflection, as well as adequate tools and materials with which to investigate.
4. I need time and opportunities to connect what I am expected to learn to my life in some way.
5. It's critical for me to talk about what I am thinking and to share my ideas. This helps me see things in new and varied ways and connect my understandings.
6. When I feel acknowledged and valued for my contributions, I learn successfully.

Without these conditions of learning, any course syllabus lacked relevance and importance to my reason for learning in the first place—to improve the quality of my life. Isn't this the underlying motive behind all learning? These understandings directly influenced my view of the implied curriculum in schooling, that is, the learning environment—the social climate of a classroom or a school, behaviors that are clearly valued but not necessarily attached to a grade.

Knowing myself as a learner guided my strong belief that the culture of a classroom has to be that of a community—each person must be respected, valued, and honored for what he or she brings to the community. In studying Howard Gardner's theory about multiple intelligences, I found support for this recognition of diversity. He believes that we all possess a little of all the various intelligences; however, our strengths usually lie in one or two of them. Finding where these strengths are in our students is vital because, as Gardner notes, in order to teach children, we have to reach them. When we reach students, they feel understood and valued for what they already know. They have something in place to connect to the new information being presented.

After graduation from the University of Montana, I secured a position in a Chapter One program teaching grades one through six. I was working with the students who were struggling, not meeting grade-level expectations. They were not engaged in learning tasks and displayed little motivation. My role was to find out why these students were struggling and support them in reaching their learning goals. I was responsible for teaching them new strategies and new tools, to enable them to have greater success in the traditional classroom. My knowledge about the research on various intelligences and learning styles gave me the conceptual understanding necessary to begin this task.

I began by getting to know the students as unique individuals, possessing diverse abilities and varied strengths. I concentrated on helping them understand how they accessed information and showing them new ways for success in communicating what they were learning in ways that were meaningful to them. We did a great deal of group work. I showed them how to integrate what they were learning into situations in their lives. For example, they could take math into a grocery store or into a recipe for their favorite cookie. We walked a kilometer to our small town's deli, measuring the meters using a rolling meter wheel as we went.

As my students began to take ownership of their learning, their levels of engagement grew, along with a clear enthusiasm in beginning each new project we explored together. Without a doubt, individualizing the approach and empowering these students with validation of the strengths they possessed lessened their reluctance to try new things. They were noticeably more verbal and connected to what they were doing. Approaching learning with a strengths, rather than a deficit, model had clear results. They were quick to compliment each other on the strengths they were identifying and using in their learning.

The following year I had my first opportunity to be a classroom teacher, sharing a fourth-grade position. I was grateful to have begun my career with the opportunity to teach small groups of children. However, I felt really unprepared for teaching the required, explicit curriculum. All of the content goals seemed overwhelming, considering the students and their diverse needs. We were asked to lay out our year's academic goals, in print, to give to the families on parent night. I was to teach social studies, math, and language arts, from 1:00 until 3:00. My materials included an old mathematics textbook, many math manipulatives, a social studies textbook, and an English textbook. This district also had newly developed math and language arts curriculum guides. At the time, it seemed like an impossible task to me, to teach math without integrating science, or to teach English without integrating reading. My childhood experiences of fragmented and dry textbooks flashed before my eyes.

The students and administration were counting on me to use my knowledge of research on how students learned best to reach these content goals. I was determined not to teach with the same methodology I remembered as a child. I thought about my Chapter One students and how our close relationships directly affected their learning. I reflected upon my understandings of the necessary conditions of learning for me to reach the individual needs of each learner. I had many inner struggles that first year. Would I teach students all the information expected of me in the time I was given? Or was the

amount of information covered the real issue? What was it I should tell the parents their children would learn over the coming year?

I continued reading research and volunteering for any work in curriculum development to gain more understanding and direction for my teaching. A close and admired colleague kept saying, "Remember, Gail, less well-taught is more in the end." I knew this to be true—I'd seen it and I had lived it. To this day, I recite that when I struggle with the definition of curriculum. It is not the amount of information or subject material that should direct my planning. On the contrary, especially in elementary school, I cannot take students where they are not ready to go.

As my students began to take ownership of their learning, their levels of engagement grew ....

Important concrete experiences and groundwork must precede mastery of any concept. I know students must have concrete experiences leading to the pictorial representation and then bridged to any abstract thinking. For example, in math we begin with building the problem using manipulatives. Next, we may draw a diagram, table, or picture and describe it using language. Lastly, we tie our problem to the abstract-number symbols.

I gained important professional insights when I volunteered to be a representative on the district's social studies curriculum review team. I also worked on a committee that was supporting the implementation of a program made possible through a grant in "aesthetic literacy." Aesthetic literacy addressed content goals by using the arts. This approach valued the kinesthetic, musical, and spatial intelligences. I was discovering that traditional methods of teaching were more directed towards the linear, mathematical intelligences and rarely tapped into the needs of the other kinds of intelligences. This aesthetic approach to literacy taught about large ideas rather than discrete, compartmentalized content areas. For example, understanding opera was the aesthetic goal, or large idea, for fourth grade in this school. The students attended operas; did research on opera as an art; and actually wrote, directed, and performed their own opera for the community in our the town's performing arts facility.

I was beginning to see that each time I took the opportunity to go beyond what my paid contract required of me, shared with other professionals about their classroom practices, and investigated research in curriculum change, my professional understandings grew more comprehensive. I've learned through research and experience that new learning must build upon prior knowledge; that we learn by making connections and by building and recognizing patterns; that we need to be actively involved in our learning; that students

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learn best in nurturing environments; that students' learning processes influence them; and that these processes are many times influenced by their culture, language, gender, and learning styles.

The following year I was hired to teach third grade at Cherry Valley Elementary School in Polson, Montana. This town borders the beautiful Flathead Lake and is a part of the Salish/Kootenei Indian Reservation. The first professional growth experience I had in this district was the opportunity to participate in "Literacy Learning in the Classroom," a program modeled after the New Zealand reading philosophy. What a gift! My questions about how to teach the subject called "English" were being answered. Strategies for how to teach language arts in a meaningful manner were presented in ways that made so much sense to me. This model reinforced my previous assumptions about the learning conditions that are necessary for students to learn as individuals, starting from where they are and moving along at their own rate.

A major change I made now was that I rarely contrived story starters or topics for students to write or read about. During my language arts block, students learned to choose their own reading materials and began to guide their learning with their own questions. I was now able to combine fragmented bits of language exercises into a large chunk of self-regulated time. During this time, students could choose the order in which they accomplished the goals I carefully laid out for them. For about 90 minutes students read at their own individual levels; recorded their reading in their writing folders; checked out a book to take home to read aloud to a family member; wrote stories, books summaries, etc., in their first-draft writing books; had personal one-on-one conferences with me; and accomplished penmanship practice and other activities, depending on our integrated topic of study. The one-on-one conferences allowed me time to complete running reading records, monitor progress, and identify the strategies and tools that each student was ready to work on during this time. This way I was able to assist students right at their zone of proximal development—the point at which they could successfully learn something with adult support.

One support that I have in place is being a part of a nurturing, child-centered group of educators.

Students took their selected writings all the way through the writing process during this block of time. When students were ready to edit and revise their work in preparation for publishing, they signed up for a conference with me. During the conference the student read his or her story aloud to me. This was a perfect opportunity to support the need for proofreading their own work.

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Initially with my help, but increasingly on their own, students began to see what changes were necessary. After editing with the student, I recorded at least 10 words from their draft notebook that they were using correctly in their writing. I then recorded five words that they were using with close approximation (one or two letters off). Before their next conference, they reviewed their lists to self-monitor whether they were now in fact using this new information in their writing. It was remarkable how this approach promoted independence and ownership in their learning.

This is now my third year of a holistic, individualized approach to reading and writing. Each year I've asked my students what their favorite time of the day was. Consistently, they have replied "language arts." I really believe it is because so many of the necessary conditions of learning are in place during this time. The students feel so much ownership in their learning.

I never forget that I am an evolving learner myself in this process. One support that I have in place is being a part of a nurturing, child-centered group of educators. We have set up a study group that has met twice a month to keep us growing and researching effective teaching strategies.

Another powerful experience in professional development has been my participation in our district's Science Curriculum Development Committee. Last year, for two days a month, I met with colleagues teaching grades 1-12. We read and discussed current research in learning theory and curriculum and studied current national and state standards. This was an invaluable opportunity to collaborate with colleagues across all grade levels and gain understanding of the challenges that we all face. Parents were also invited to join in this investigative process. Having the parents involved added important insights for ways to better involve families in their child's education. We now had a meeting of the minds that were actually involved in curriculum research, namely classroom teachers and the children's first teachers—their parents. We could take what we were learning and apply it directly to our classrooms. This experience was incredibly validating and educational. I truly feel every classroom teacher would benefit from this opportunity. As a result, curricular goals have been more realistic because the most important researchers have been creating them—teachers and parents.

In conclusion, I am proud to be a part of a profession that is responsible for teaching, guiding, and supporting our nation's most valuable resource—its children. To actively pursue the most current research and use it to guide how I help children acquire knowledge is clearly my ethical obligation. I'm thankful that, as a professional, I have the continued opportunity to be a learner and researcher myself. I will

continue to be reflective about the learning atmosphere in my classroom and in the school community where I teach. I will remain very active in my classroom and professional research, and continue to participate in opportunities that support and further my understandings about both the implied and explicit curriculum in our schools. Curriculum, as I now understand it, is more than the content areas we teach. It is the whole educational arena. It is the consistent way in which adults model what they expect the children to know and be able to do. Curriculum includes everything the child experiences from the time he or she enters the doors of the school building. It is both implied and explicit. The benefits of teaching to the whole child are visible in the children's enthusiasm and motivation to ask questions, take risks, and honor each person for the individual strengths they offer as an important part of the whole community.

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Choosing the Road Less Traveled

Susan Seaman

I have been an educator for 27 years. Seeing such a statement in print amazes me. Many vivid memories are of events that could have occurred yesterday. As I reflect on my experiences as an educator and my beliefs about learning and teaching, I realize that they both have interacted to shape each other. Choosing many opportunities for growth has resulted in changes in both my teaching practices and my beliefs. My belief system is inseparable from the matrix of people, ideas, materials, and environments with which I have worked.

I began to learn about curriculum in the school context as a teachers' assistant. My early years in the classroom were in open-concept schools where collaborative planning was valued enough to provide weekly release time. I have experienced that curricular changes at the staff level do occur if staff have regular quality time to engage in reflection and discussion. Working with elementary and secondary students, including physically challenged students; instructing Title I students in team, open-concept, and individual classroom scenarios; and working with student tutors, parent helpers, and colleagues provided learning opportunities that supported the period of growth which is the chapter of my story that follows.

There came a time when I stood in my sixth-grade classroom and sensed that I was ready for new professional challenges. I had taught upper elementary and middle school in five settings. My children were infants. I was fascinated by the developmental process of learning. I did not have anything specific in mind, but did have a growing interest in early education. Ironically, without my voicing this to anyone, a few days later two of the first-grade teachers journeyed down the hallway and asked if I would join their team. I answered "Yes," and my principal consented.

I was saved from certain professional suicide by taking "Math Their Way" late in the summer prior to the beginning of school. Classroom management techniques vary dramatically between first and sixth grade. Transitions from one activity to another are critical bridges. I practiced a wide array of them that I otherwise would have been unable to use, beginning that first day in my new professional life.

I had learned about and experienced a hands-on, constructivist approach to early childhood mathematics education and was deter-

mined to implement the activities. All of us learn best when given the opportunity to experience concrete and connecting activities that support the understanding of abstract concepts. My previous training with an experiential, terrarium-based science program had given me a context of application that scaffolded this next step.

Even before I started teaching, I had been fascinated by John Dewey's beliefs about the active construction of knowledge and Vygotsky's explanation of language acquisition. Now, I was observing daily examples of what Dewey and Vygotsky had described. I had an opportunity to experience what I had read about—to observe, reflect upon, and learn from what my students were showing me, themselves, and each other. Being a keen observer would help me to be a better facilitator of student learning and a more enlightened assessor of what students were able to do. Increasingly I moved away from worksheet-type activities and toward activities that gave students opportunities to learn about mathematics and science by doing. They also learned more about sound-symbol relationships by writing and sharing and reflecting than by responding to someone else's thinking that was presented in a worksheet format.

I was also learning more about learning styles and multiple intelligences. Through constructing activities that provided more multisensory approaches and more choices to students, I was learning more about how each of them learned and how each of them was gifted. I found it difficult to label students as "low," "middle," or "high." The rating was dependent upon the subject and context.

I wanted my students to have more active learning opportunities than I could implement by myself. I encouraged parents to come into the classroom as learning facilitators. I learned to structure activities that parents could conduct to support student learning of concepts that I did not have the time to provide directly. Including parents paid huge dividends compared to the additional energy that was necessary to prepare to utilize their individual talents. They read with students; they listened to students read their stories and helped them with editing. Parents conducted small group mathematics, science, and art activities. Parents brought their enthusiasm to the task at hand. Students experienced more supported learning contexts and teaching styles. Students and parents felt important. Students knew that their parents and teacher were committed to helping them learn as much as our time together would permit. Short notes went home daily to connect home with school. Parents followed up on classroom learning. I had little difficulty securing supplies needed to conduct experiential activities.

In addition to generating activities facilitated by parent volunteers, I worked with a fifth-grade teacher to develop a buddy program.

Fifth- and first-grade students worked together to complete integrated reading-mathematics-science-art activities. The older buddies were prepared by their teacher to support the learnings of the first-grade students. As I had learned when I placed high school students as reading tutors for kindergarten students, the buddy system resulted in mutually supportive relationships and increased enthusiasm for learning. As the grade span between buddies was much smaller, some of the fifth-grade students discovered that they needed to review certain content to be effective learning facilitators.

I was not comfortable using basal readers complete with teacher-proof scripts and working with one reading group while keeping other students occupied. I felt too separated from providing support to those who were supposed to be learning on their own while I was trying to work with groups. As I tried to teach using the reading groups, my heart told me that there had to be a better way. Teaching and learning, though they usually occur in a shared setting, are highly personal activities. I became more aware that students need a wide range of learning opportunities, choice, and support. I had learned as a fifth-grade teacher that follow-up conferences with students to discuss tradebooks they had read were effective. Students could read what they enjoyed. I could guide them to a variety of genres and support them in language arts skills development.

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Joining a TAWL (Teachers Attempting Whole Language) group provided support to me during this process. We shared with each other the innovations we were attempting. We suggested professional readings to each other. I wanted to learn more about the process and progress of others who were exploring the possibilities of whole language. I voraciously read books related to whole language instruction. I followed a recursive process of reading, implementing, reflecting, and evaluating. The thinking of a number of researchers and writers on literacy inspired my thinking and supported the refinement of my process. I adapted their ideas to complement my beliefs and enrich learning opportunities for students.

The reading and reflection coincided with "giving it a go." I implemented a number of changes in my classroom. The scripted basals became supplemental. I began to use tradebooks predominantly as the books my students and I read. We were having quite an adventure! I would have been wise to buy stock in the tradebook companies my paycheck supported. By the early 1990s, the illustrations

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and stories in picture books were rich. Excellent children's literature provided patterns and models for my students to internalize.

I often sat in a niche of our classroom learning house to display and share books that related to whatever theme we were exploring. Students' "ooohs" and "aaahs" showed their growing appreciation for the creativity of the illustrators. These were automatic art lessons! We talked about media and composition. We talked about book awards. We talked about authors. We talked about genre. We talked about content. We talked about the author's decisionmaking process to select specific words supported by illustrations. Yes, first-grade students are entirely capable of doing such things. In fact, when I requested that they be vigilant in searching for examples of integration of mathematics in the tradebooks we were using, they found more examples than had occurred to me.

I had recently discovered that I could not effectively use the teacher-proof scripts in basal texts. Now, I was discovering that I felt comfortable using fewer and fewer copied sheets. Students could do most of the work themselves! This was quite a revelation to me. They wrote on chalkboards, they wrote and dated journals that revealed their language skills acquisition, they made books of pattern stories, and they made up their own stories. They talked with each other, demonstrated, and wrote about how they were solving mathematics problems. They learned about language and content by being immersed in and responsible for engagement in learning—reading, writing, listening, speaking, and manipulating ideas and materials.

Just about the time I was starting to feel that I was able to integrate the reading-writing process and also not forget phonics, I attended a National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Regional Conference. The draft of the Curriculum Standards was shared. This was exciting! I instantly gravitated to these ideas that were compatible with what I knew: Process supports the mastery of content. Teachers must facilitate active learning environments rich in context. Students must be active in their learning and be required to think about and share their learning processes with their peers and teacher.

They learned about language and content by being immersed in and responsible for engagement in learning—reading, writing, listening, speaking, and manipulating ideas and materials.

On a daily basis, I was beginning to integrate the theories that had fascinated me. Although the physical demands of raising three young children and facilitating the learning of primary-grade students in an active learning model were overwhelming at times, this professional

experience was encouraging and invigorating. My emerging teaching values and beliefs matched those encouraged by national professional organizations and cognitive researchers.

Elementary curriculum content is impossibly wide and potentially shallow. Integrating curriculum permitted the chunking of content into meaningful contexts. My students were using more and more hands-on materials. They were talking more and more with one another and with me about concepts. There was more activity and noise in the classroom, but it was not rowdy or loud. It was purpose-filled. Students were writing and drawing about their processes. They were accountable for explaining their processes as well as their answers. Thinking about their thinking and sharing the process was difficult for some in the beginning. However, when they realized that this was expected, the students gradually assumed more responsibility for monitoring their thought processes and reflecting on the strategies they used. This empowered them to become more active learners.

I was applying the concepts I had read about. I was letting go of some of the direct control in my classroom. Of course, this called for sufficient planning to structure activities that others, such as parent helpers and fifth-grade buddies, could implement successfully. I could be an observer of student processes within a system that I had set up. Observations of student process could become a portion of the record of student progress.

The district report card reporting system did not tell enough of the story. I was developing a reporting plan that combined a wide variety of student products such as assessment sheets, journal entries, projects, and my "kid watching" and individual assessment records. I referred to the report cards at conference time, but I also pulled out the documentation and portfolio of student work. The student, parent, and I would discuss the examples of student learning. At first, I was a bit worried about how this change might be perceived in our conservative community. Would some parents prefer the more traditional reporting data? Not one parent over a span of years ever complained. To the contrary, they were highly supportive of this process. They could appreciate how the examples of student work were revealing their child's evolving competencies. Work samples and the data I explained made sense to them and provided meaningful information to them about their child. I hoped that the items that were precious to me and to my students could be of benefit to the next teachers, but they were not ready for such information to be useful to them. The process I was developing was time-consuming, but rewarding in the quality of information it gave me about my students.

Now, as my latest change, I have left the classroom to pursue a doctorate in Educational Administration, my dissertation focusing on

assessment. Initially, the thought of becoming an administrator was as appealing to me as dry toast. However, I am thankful to have the formal training in systems and leadership that I was studying informally anyway. Four years ago, I completed my first administrative degree and became the curriculum director of the Moscow, Idaho, school district. I have not forgotten what it is like to teach. I still do teach. However, my pupils are as likely to be teachers as kindergarten through university students.

Nearly every teacher is working harder than ever before. Teachers must be honored for their accomplishments. The questions that come to my mind more and more these days are:

- Do we fill students' time with vital process and content?
- Are students learning how to apply what they are learning to situations they may encounter outside of school?
- Do we need to reprioritize, for example, determine how to do a higher quality job of addressing fewer topics or concepts?
- What documentation could we agree upon which demonstrates that the specified learning has taken place?

Working together, teachers, parents, administrators, and students determine the answers to these questions, answers that will result in the preparation of our students to meet the challenges of their future.

Navigating Sameness

Karen Mitchell

> "If you always do what you've always done, the results will always be the same."
>
> —Stedman Graham

"This teacher has taught over 20 years so she knows what she's talking about." The words struck me as I read a student's journal in my undergraduate education theory class at the local university. For observers outside of any profession "experience" may have connotations at either end of the sprectrum: either authority or stagnation. In fact, those of us who have been around the block a few times know the truth lies somewhere in the middle. As I attempt to reflect upon my journey into the murky waters of curriculum, standards, and children over the last 21 years as an elementary teacher and language arts specialist in the Juneau, Alaska, School District, I realize that this opportunity daunts me. Thousands of thoughts come and go related to this subject; I've had a difficult time actually sitting down to write. How to begin? What's the truth versus what I remember happening? How have I tried to teach children and not curriculum?

We have been most fortunate in Alaskan schools to have more academic freedom than I hear reported from my colleagues around the nation. This phenomenon can be a double-edged sword: We can adapt what works for us in relation to the children we have, but we also risk overexposing children to otherwise good materials and activities. For example, science units appropriate for different grade levels get extensive use. In my first year as a language arts specialist, while visiting classrooms throughout the district, I noticed that every class from third to fifth grade was dissecting salmon. On the other hand, we have been able to capitalize on the interests of the students, as a colleague of mine did after her second-graders brought in a radio broadcast they had devised during recess one day in the early 1980s. That interest evolved into a station, KHBV111 (for the school and the room number), during which children learned about different genres of stories, to name only one aspect. It is an example of what can be accomplished when teachers assume responsibility and are given the flexibility to generate curriculum based upon children's interests, while still including curricular concerns. I have also had the incredible good fortune to work with seasoned professionals who care deeply about children and who encouraged me at the right times to evolve and change. Tempering this, I am ingrained with the soul of the skeptic. This sometimes frustrating, nagging feeling has

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helped me, I believe, to question practices in terms of how they make the most sense for children as they grow and develop.

The first part of my career was marked by adherence to basal-driven curriculum saved, from time to time, by ideas brought in by other colleagues and inservice presenters. There was not much emphasis on actually *using* the district's curriculum (and until recently there never has been, from a teacher's perspective). I'm not sure I understood what curriculum really was at that point in my career—that the best curricula define clear goals, and materials are selected to support the students in their understandings. Many a Sunday I spent making dittos copied from the basal and other manuals from science, social studies, and math, focusing on minute skills designed to build a ladder to the main concept. My lesson plans were full of page numbers—easy references for quick searching for words to say during lessons. This was not all bad, of course. It did alert me to the various aspects of teaching reading and other subjects, something for which I was ill prepared in my teacher education program. I didn't "teach" writing. I taught spelling and sentences, and let them write maybe two stories a year, *if* they were lucky!

I suppose at that time I would have defined curriculum as a tightly sequenced set of skills designed to help a child learn "reading," "writing," or "science." The focus was on the specific content of a discipline to the exclusion of the process of developing a true understanding of the principles inherent in any particular subject, and how that subject interrelates with others in the real world.

Curriculum is a tricky thing and anyone who doesn't think so can compare their district's curricula from the 1960s or '70s with the scope and sequence of any basal in any subject. It's hard to discern which came first. One of the first teacher-made curricula that I actually used was given to me in my third year of teaching when I was transferred to another school. Children were grouped within primary and intermediate grades according to reading level (tracking is another issue), and we all taught a group of children intermixed from our classrooms and others. First grade was not included. Although we did rely on phonics books, using this reading curriculum forced me to search out other materials and to use some of the then sparse, but growing, number of professional books. I was able to develop some interesting ways to present material, but our focus on the material itself still negated children, their abilities, and their interests. I remember a parent saying to me, "Tony reads all the time at home. He says he likes to read, but he hates Reading." I commiserated with her, giving what I thought was a reasonable reason for forcing hours of phonics pages upon children. However, as I worked with the program, and with the basal that I taught later on in the morning to my own class, I realized that it had come straight from the scope and

sequence. In relating this story, I do not in *any* way intend to demean or criticize the faculty who spent many hours after school and on weekends developing the program. At the time, it was recognized as an exemplary practice by the state department of education.

Basal-driven curricula have pervaded (and in some instances still do pervade) the mind-sets of the antireformers. While I have always eschewed the word "reform," preferring "evolution" instead, the phenomenon of curriculum derived from what education professionals know to be research- and performance-based has been greeted in the general public with much skepticism, and in some instances with much cynicism. I suppose this view comes from the idea of content-driven curricula based on what "the experts" (read: university professors and researchers) say. Teachers are viewed as the technicians who carry out the experts' curricula. Yet as a classroom teacher, watching a child perform a task is what *I* always relied on to give me information about what any child knew. Even so, I gave children the recipes from the basal teacher's manual that the "experts" suggested, designed to make students better at paper and pencil tasks, calculations, and standardized tests. I was not frustrated by this method, although it seemed boring, because I had not yet made the necessary connection that isolated "teachable moments" are important to curriculum as a whole.

In the back of the room, the *real* learning took place after the serious work of the classroom was churned out and finished. Games were played; the impromptu skits played out upon the grand stage of the speckled linoleum in front of the perennially stopped-up sink. One day during my second year of teaching, my second graders who had finished their "important" seatwork sat at the back of the classroom sharing one of the library books I had brought in to supplement our unit on the human body. I was up front with a reading group. As I began to hear comments about the pictures of developing babies, I had to pretend to pay attention to what I was doing. "Boy, we were sure ugly!" Chris opined. In the back of my mind, the nagging thought, "There *must* be a better way," reared its ugly head. Here I was teaching what I was supposed to, and my students were making meaning for themselves without any direction from me!

> I remember a parent saying to me, "Tony reads all the time at home. He says he likes to read, but he hates Reading."

Surprisingly, the one area in which I knew there was a better way surfaced fairly early on my career, since I was fortunate to have landed in a school where children were encouraged to write. The year I had a pre-first class, a colleague shared ideas about invented spelling

with me, and I learned how children develop their own sense of spelling when they're encouraged to write what they know on topics of their own interest. I remember Katie drawing a beautiful picture of her house and garden, followed by a string of letters. When she rose to share her story, she elaborated and told us much more than was on the page. Also, what was on the page related to the beginning consonants of the skeleton of her story, and must have served as prompts for her as she shared. This incident and others like it were the first signs that children could think about and revise their ideas. However, it was not until my first writing process course in the early 1980s that I realized something was missing in my own instruction and sense of how children develop as writers: real response and the opportunity to revise ideas. I welcomed these ideas because they gave us an opportunity to linger on important ideas and come to understandings about such things as writing clearly and adding detail. Classroom discourse, or having children interact with me and with one another, was vital to this process. I now know that this piece is an important one to write into curriculum, so that it becomes a standard classroom practice. We can deal with the skills and concepts of content if we focus a part of our curriculum on the process of learning and the importance of learning from others.

Learning how to add response and revision helped me to search out other avenues to improve my teaching and begin to look with new eyes not only in writing, but in other subject areas as well.

Learning how to add response and revision helped me to search out other avenues to improve my teaching and begin to look with new eyes not only in writing, but in other subject areas as well. I embraced the idea of writing across the curriculum. In a sense, I began to feel freed from the constraints of the basal, drawing from many sources, including the growing plethora of professional books and journals, to improve my students' learning. However, I still viewed this learning as extra, added on to an already overwhelming demand on the short time allotted to actual class time in the school day. Accountability still came in the form of standardized tests, and the unspoken fear of having one's poor teaching exposed by low test scores promised that most of the day would be spent adhering to skill development instead of process learning. Content-filled tests, as one of the few forms of assessment until the development of the portfolio and the opportunity for children to show what they can do through projects, continued to affect how curricula were developed.

Any teacher knows that most curricula are fashioned in such a way as to make them seem like the most important discipline you are obligated to teach. What you are not taught is how to look at each

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curriculum with a discerning eye, how to make decisions about the core pieces *that coincide with the needs and interests of the children in your class*. The isolated incidents I have given above were shining examples of how curriculum could serve the needs of children. I was introduced to the notion that teachers could be researchers in their own classrooms—that we could wonder about children and observe them in the *process* of learning. I have struggled with this idea throughout the latter half of my career, and for me it marks the point when I consciously identified myself as a learner among learners, both adults and children. One of the first questions I asked was whether journal time in class was really worth the effort. I collected data on the evolution of children's writing as they were given the opportunity to write daily, uninterrupted journal entries. The evidence erased my skepticism. The first day, Luke wrote "I lik (sic) cars a lot." About three weeks later, he wrote a whole paragraph beginning, "I like the river. It's smooth and soft...."

Although I had embraced a writing- and literature-based program for several years before, the advent of the Alaska Standards and their influence on our own curriculum in the Juneau School District began to give me a clearer picture of what any curriculum could look like in an elementary classroom when combined with the interests of the children and also with other disciplines. The addition of the process of learning to district curricula helped immensely. For example, adding journaling to the math curriculum gave me a way to bring language into math, and helped me to really see what children understood. The old curriculum was simply a list of mathematical skills and concepts contained in any math basal. I developed a teacher research question about how children would use math journals, did professional reading, collected data and, with the help of a friend, looked seriously at how kids expressed their understandings and frustrations. This project also helped me develop better ways to use the journals for specific purposes, to develop specific prompts that worked better for the kinds of information I needed to plan lessons based on the children's needs.

Due to the new focus on the process of learning, and my own perception of myself as a learner in a community of learners, I began to envision a better use of classroom time. I stopped feeling guilty for reading social studies or science materials during reading time, or using a writing workshop for social studies reports and multidisciplinary projects. With the advent of standards-based curricula with clear goals for students, I moved my binders containing the school district's curricula, which had long collected dust in my closet, next to my desk. Over the course of the last several years they have actually become as dog-eared from use as my basal manuals had been. Choices other than "do this now or stay in for recess" became a regular part of the classroom menu. I began to see that when these

choices are given, children choose those projects that showcase their strengths.

Another "aha" about change occurred in the early 1990s. While attending the Bread Loaf School of English on a DeWitt Wallace/ Reader's Digest Fellowship one summer, I consulted with a faculty member about a teacher research project I was doing that dealt with teachers' literacy. As I described my project to her, she kept asking, "Yes, but *why* do you want to do this project?" I was slightly irritated, not knowing how to answer, but kept thinking about her question. Eventually I realized I had chosen this particular project because I believe that if we don't think about and take care of our own literacy, it's very difficult to convey the importance of it to children. This realization, in turn, gave me the opportunity to celebrate children's strengths and get underneath to work on the weaknesses, to ask *why*. For example, I was able to inject historical learning and work on writing, reading, and performance skills at the same time as described in the following description of a project.

One of the most exciting classroom projects I've done over the years, I believe, was the culmination of our study of the Tlingit culture from its beginnings to the present day through the use of legends and contemporary writers. This project evolved from "ahas" that finally occurred to me while helping to develop the social studies materials kits for the third grade. In the absence of any grade-based published materials, third-grade teachers in our district have had to improvise the teaching of Juneau history. In the late 1980s, two of my grade three colleagues and I amassed the many materials available around town and in state library archives about this subject in two large tubs for each school. We did not write curriculum, but suggested that teachers use the materials as they saw fit for their classes. While writing the introduction to this kit, I realized that this was, perhaps, the most important statement I could write, that it was so freeing to tell other teachers to use their own judgment that perhaps I should follow my own advice!

The next year as I worked extensively with the kit, something seemed to be missing. Juneau history started in 1881, yet the Tlingit people were already here. It made no sense to start only 100 years ago when centuries of culture existed here before then. And what about the kids in my classes who were Tlingit, yet only got to see a glimpse of their culture in school during the two weeks we had an Indian Studies instructor come to the classroom, or at assemblies where Tlingit dances were performed? I re-thought my curriculum for the coming year, asking why I wanted to do certain activities, and how choice could be built into an understanding of the origins of culture in this area of the globe. I looked at what the district curriculum dictated in terms of process and standards. Our standards about reading and

writing for a variety of purposes and audiences, completing projects, and appreciating differing points of view fit especially well.

We started at the beginning of school by reading *The Tlingit* by Alice Osinski, a New True Book that is a good beginning third-grade book for low-average to higher readers. The resource teacher helped me adapt and tape it for kids with reading problems. This book covers many aspects of Tlingit life, bringing up present concerns of maintaining a culture but living in a modern world. It has pictures of the places our kids see every day. We read legends, extracting knowledge of geography, science, and religion that have existed since the dawn of the culture.

By studying a culture in such a way, reading and talking about a variety of sources and having classroom guests such as storytellers come in, rather than learning just from prepared lessons, filmstrips, and the like, we all began to see that people are more alike than different, that every group of people has an intellectual as well as a spiritual life. Kids began to bring in family artifacts. Real projects began to be generated naturally as children chose groups on scripting a legend heard, writing an original story in the form of a legend, using knowledge gained to script an original play, and other project groups of a similar nature. Two quiet little girls, who couldn't decide what to do, finally chose poster-making using medicinal knowledge of local plants gleaned from a local Southeast village cookbook. I decided not to "teach them how to make a poster," but to give them the materials and see what they'd do. What developed was an amazing story about a little girl taking a walk, getting hurt, and using plants to help her. Pictures and knowledge of content abounded. I learned more about their writing skills, sense of story, and sequencing than I ever did from some of the meager offerings in their writing folders. The children doing the artwork for the legend revised their pictures of men in modern fatigues based on research of Tlingit armor. Real learning occurred, although I began to get nervous about the amount of time it was taking! (I got over it.) I truly knew we had all gained some mutual understanding when a white child introduced the original play during our celebration luncheon by saying, "The names we used might seem weird to us, but please don't laugh. They are old Tlingit names we found." (Not a direct quote, but the essence is there.)

> Most teachers I know are too busy to have underlying political agendas; they lie awake at night worrying about how to reach individual children who seem lost in their classes.

I also learned much about the sometimes invisible support for education in my native students' households that we, as white teachers, tend to overlook because it's not always visible to us. Parents who do not show up at conferences because they might be scared of what

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we will say about their child will support and attend events based on sound curricula that allow their child to be who he or she is. The process of learning that takes place during that time of study, a mix of multidimensional and traditional learning, carries over to learning the rest of the year. In *Kwanzaa and Me*, Vivian Paley asks a black parent, "Can white people be role models?" "You bet," she smiles. "As long as they respect and encourage my children to express their differences, their particular culture and knowledge."

Over the last seven or eight years, I have read several articles about generating curriculum based on the needs and interests of children and parents, combined with school and district goals. As with most trends in education, this can be viewed myopically, even seen as hostile to traditional curriculum. Therefore, using multicultural literature or focusing on "big ideas" rather than finite skills in building competence in any given discipline becomes translated as the death of the traditional European canon; cooperative/collaborative techniques in the classroom are seen in some quarters as communism, as an underlying plot by the left to thwart the importance of the individual in American society. Yet most teachers I know are too busy to have underlying political agendas; they lie awake at night worrying about how to reach individual children who seem lost in their classes. They go to school on weekends and take work home. They call parents and try to work out solutions.

The best advice about social responsibility and learning about curriculum I have read in recent years was from Grant Wiggins, talking about assessment and our social obligation that goes hand-in-hand with curriculum reform. He talks about keeping enough of the traditional to make some things familiar, while introducing the innovation accompanied by a rational explanation. In my view, that is what should be done with curriculum. No minority parents I have talked to want their children to be ignorant of the canon, to eschew those aspects of American culture that will help their children succeed in this world. Yet in our zeal to embrace "reform" we ignore those aspects of traditional content-driven curriculum that were working. The use of clear standards as a basis for curriculum that has common goals with the learning community helps alleviate some of these misunderstandings.

As human beings we cannot embrace change overnight. We need to evolve in our understandings of knowledge, of how children learn, and of how parents support what we do. We must navigate the sameness and insist on change.

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On Change as a Constant: An Interview with a Curriculum Development Team

Jane Braunger

Education is marked by a number of cycles. The school year moves along with predictable periods of uncertainty, energy, tension, accomplishment, celebration, and reflection. Teacher evaluation and student assessment occur with regularity. In many schools and districts, priorities are set yearly, and plans monitored to accomplish them.

In curriculum, the textbook adoption cycle has been a standard way of renewing and updating instruction. Many districts experience this as a constant process, in which, typically, one curriculum area is developing criteria for a new adoption, while another is applying its criteria to the selection of materials, and yet another is implementing the newly adopted materials.

In Spokane Public Schools, the most recent adoption cycle for social studies in grades six through nine began in 1995, when a group of 23 teachers representing those grade levels convened to develop a framework for the social studies curriculum. Guided both by the newly adopted Washington State Essential Learnings and by the need to develop a coherent curriculum at grades 6-9, the group set out to establish goals for student learning in social studies and then select the classroom learning experiences and resources best suited to accomplish them.

At the sixth grade, the course developed and the text selected (Our World's Story *by Harcourt Brace) represented a major departure from the previous social studies curriculum. In October, 1997, Jane Braunger of NWREL's Curriculum and Instruction Services interviewed four of the sixth-grade teachers and the district social studies specialist who had served on the committee to learn their story of the process from the design of the curriculum in 1995-96, through the pilot phase of materials (1996-97), and into full implementation of the curriculum during the 1997-98 school year. As they described this experience in curriculum development, the teachers discussed how it affected their views of what sixth-graders need to know about social studies, which experiences support development of those understandings, and what roles teachers and students have in this process.*

Participants in the interview included Dana Ault (D) of Mullen Road School; Barbara Evers (B) of Audubon School; Merrilou Harrison (M), district social studies specialist; Catalina (Kat) Svoboda (K) of Ridgeview School; and Warren Wheeler (W) of Woodridge Elementary.

Several themes emerged during the interview, particularly the key role of guiding questions in shifting the curriculum's focus from content coverage to indepth understanding of "big ideas." In addition, the group emphasized the importance of looking at a student's overall learning experience and goals: Teachers need to be able to see the big picture, not just the grade level or content area they teach. They broadened their understanding of curriculum and the need for more integration across concepts and content areas. Central to the success of the new curriculum was the idea of teachers as learners, supported by colleagues as they develop new ways of teaching, and, in turn, supporting students as risk-takers and critical thinkers. Excerpts from the interview follow.

In describing the interaction among committee members in the early stages of the work, the sixth-grade teachers noted how moving to a "big ideas" focus created some tensions about current teaching practice.

K: One of the things that was being tossed around the table was that at that point the curriculum in our district presented a Eurocentric view. What was being taught at [grades] six, seven, eight, and nine maybe needed to be revamped, because we needed to talk about more than just Europe. That was very, very heated. People had some real ownership about favorite units: "We've always done a medieval unit and I'm going to keep on doing one, because that is what I held my files for."

These disagreements about content and developing consistency across grades 6-9 weren't about good and bad teaching, but more about competing visions for social studies curriculum.

W: Teachers at certain grades seemed to be very cohesive and making a lot of progress, but other grades had a wide variety of personalities, and while this was interesting, it was also frustrating. I felt this stymied our progress. And yet, I realized that all of these people were also selected (for the curriculum team) because they are very good teachers.

M: Very knowledgeable.

W: So, while initially I was apprehensive, I had to step back and realize that, for example, one teacher wants to teach that Greek civilization unit because he has a passion for it. When they all spoke, their passions for their subject matter really came through. You really saw

how fervently they believed and how dedicated they were. But they did not possess the ability to step outside and look at the big picture of what we are after and how it was all going to work together.

K: Someone said we were taking something away from them.

NWREL: This was one of the first times that elementary people, trained more in working with children across all of the curriculum areas, were working with junior high and high school people, trained as subject area specialists. And together, you were charged with determining the goals of the curriculum. So, what happened? I'm hearing that you respected their commitment to their work.

W: Yes, but we did not respect the "horse-blinder syndrome"—the inability to step back and look at the overall picture and try to realize that change is a constant thing. We elementary teachers are just used to that. It was frustrating that a few of the teachers could not see this and let go of some of the things they were currently doing.

K: We worked backwards. We looked at where the kids would probably be tested and on what, in grades 12, 11, 10, 9, 8. Then we said, "If the kids are going to be tested on X in seventh grade, then we have to do that in sixth grade. We have to make sure that they have that piece in sixth grade." So, that's what drove some of the changes. It wasn't that we had just decided that we liked teaching a certain book.

M: They saw what other districts had done and where things were laid out as far as themes. This "feature emphasis" at each grade level was a key thing they looked at. Another thing that came through in the committee's minutes is that they looked at what national testing and national standards were putting emphasis on at each grade level. They looked at what different states had done. They gathered information about other districts and studied the recommendations of people in the world of social studies—the gurus. From all of that data, then they made some decisions. So, it wasn't just what they felt like or what they thought was working out only in our district.

> The one thing we always were asked to keep in the back of our heads was, what is the picture of the high school graduate going to look like?

NWREL: What kinds of things were you seeing?

K: A more integrated approach, with social studies integrated into writing and into math. We saw a shift from the traditional focus on, for example, Canada and Latin America to topics such as rural populations and population movements. We were seeing more global topics. This meant that teachers could then pick and choose what

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would be the best vehicle for studying the idea. That was a big paradigm shift for people who might be feeling, for example, "We have always taught Japan in the seventh grade."

W: In the formative phases of working with the other grade levels, the idea of working backwards was exciting for me. The one thing we always were asked to keep in the back of our heads was, what is the picture of the high school graduate going to look like? And I felt a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. We were all on board trying to work together to produce a product here.

Moving from identification of the big issues, such as population movements, to decisions about instruction and resources took more time and much discussion. A critical element in the process was the development of "guiding questions" that would support rich, indepth study and thinking.

W: We felt that if we had high-level questions that guided our thinking and the students' thinking as we worked our way through the entire curriculum, this would be something that would enhance student understanding. It could be used for assessment; it was something that could "strand" the whole thing together.

For example, on the theme of population movement, a guiding question is "Are there reasons other than economical and political that prompt population movement?" We wanted questions beyond the rote, so that after having learned this volume of information about history and geography, students could take that information and apply it to higher level thinking. So, a student would have to analyze, "Well, let's see. I read about this population moving and this one. What were the reasons? Are there reasons besides the two mentioned here that prompt a huge population shift?"

And, then, more importantly, I think one of the reasons we developed guiding questions was the modern application. If you think about these questions, then you are more inclined to become a problem solver in the modern age, because these processes are still happening now. So students could look at shifting populations today, analyze the issue in a historical context, and become problem solvers based on factual information.

K: Also, the guiding questions kept us focused. If we know what the guiding question is, as we are going through materials we can find relevant information. It kept us on track. We made sure we discussed questions that pulled in economics, geography, history, science.

The issue arose of how successful students would be in working with a curriculum driven by complex guiding questions.

W: Here's one from the theme of indigenous cultures. "What attributes of cultures are receptive or resistant to technological innovation?" Those are pretty lofty ideas, so when other teachers first see the guiding question, their response is typically, "Lord-a-mighty! How am I ever going to get that across to my kids?" Yet, maybe we are selling our kids short. Maybe they are capable of processing that information, if allowed to think on it and be guided into it, as well as they can retain and memorize factual information. Maybe they can deal with it.

Last year, I worked on this with my students, and I made a big issue out of it. In fact, I challenged them, saying, "A lot of people think you sixth-graders don't have the brain development to handle this. What do you think about that?" They bit right into it and said, "Yeah, we can do it."

So we had some wonderful discussions about these themes (indigenous cultures, population movement, etc.). It is very interesting because it is such a quantum leap from anything you've ever done before, especially at an elementary level.

D: But I don't think some of the teachers looked at those questions as merely for their sixth-graders. They were thinking, "Do *I* really understand this question? What am I going to do? How am I going to teach it?" You know, this is kind of mind-boggling. So I think [raising the issue of the limitations of sixth-graders' mental ability] may have been somewhat an excuse to say, "I don't like this question."

NWREL: So this way of working with guiding questions was a reconceptualization of the social studies curriculum, and also a way of rethinking the role of the teacher and the role of students, the way they would operate in learning social studies.

W: Absolutely. It has always been interesting to me that higher level thinking has been something that was for "gifted" students. Maybe we would send them to a special side of the room once a week and let them work on this type of question. Then they would come back and take part in the other routine of the classroom. I have never liked that notion. I maintain that gifted education should be happening within the classroom and every student should be challenged in certain ways. So, this is a big shift, but it is one I am glad to see happening, because I've wanted to see all students embark on higher level thinking.

In talking with parents at open house last week, I emphasized that higher level thinking is the direction we need to be moving in with students. We need to be preparing students who can think on their feet. Stuffing their heads with facts clearly is not getting them where

they need to be, especially in this day and age. So this is a very welcome change.

The teachers discussed the process of deciding on materials once they'd determined the guiding questions.

K: We spent a lot more time looking at guiding questions than we did looking at materials. It took us a long time to get to the materials point, because we weren't looking at just one thing (resource) that would answer all of our questions. We wanted our curriculum to do a lot more than that. We wanted it to be teacher-friendly, and we wanted it to promote higher level thinking with the kids. We wanted it to reach all different kinds of kids—special education, gifted, you know, the whole nine yards. We wanted it to be not just something in a book. We developed the curriculum and it took a long time. Then when we saw materials that fit, we felt like we were indeed on the right track.

NWREL: So you were working with curriculum as the frame that is set through these guiding questions. The curriculum is not what's in a book.

D: Yes, but those old habits come back. I find that I still have to go back and say, "What is important about this?" As Merrilou suggested at a meeting last week, work backwards: See what the important things are and then focus on those parts of it and let some of the other parts go. That's a hard concept. I've taught for 29 years and everything was precompartmentalized. To be thinking of overlapping, of integrating all of the way through, is much more comfortable this year, but last year [the pilot year] was difficult. So I can understand where the other teachers [who are working with the new curriculum for this first time this year] were coming from when they said, "Well, I can't do this." So I urge them to start with little things. For example, I suggest that they address vocabulary words thematically, and do this through spelling. Do small parts until the kids get used to this way of working, and they begin to make connections.

We developed the curriculum and it took a long time. Then when we saw materials that fit, we felt like we were indeed on the right track.

NWREL: Now that you've participated in this project, how do you see curriculum?

K: One of the things we looked at in this project was connections between social studies and other things already in place, for exam-

ple, writing, math, science. So we looked for integration, ways to tie in social studies to other content areas.

W: To me the integration is crucial because, as you just said, that's real life. You don't do things out of context in the real world. But when students have been taught things via a chapter in a textbook, in isolation, the learning hasn't been integrated, and then it's gone because it was never anchored in a meaningful context. So to me that's why integration has to be there, because it puts these things in a meaningful format in the real world and makes it possible for students to apply the knowledge.

I think we felt that we were learning new things with the children, and that's exciting. I mean, if you teach, you also love to learn.

B: And if they see something in isolation, it is not going to stay, but if they're seeing the words in spelling and in reading, and they're reading a novel about cavemen and studying Cro-Magnon Man at the same time, it's going to stay here.

NWREL: And are you finding that with the kids?

D: I'm lucky in that I have grades five and six, so I have 15 of the same children as last year. I'm flip-flopping (sixth grade last year, fifth grade this year). Yesterday one of my boys made an analogy—I can't remember what we were talking about, but his analogy was about Princess Di's car crash. I didn't say anything about making an analogy, but he came up with the word analogy, raised his hand and was talking about it. I said, "Wow, Garth, that's impressive."

K: The students whom I have as sixth-graders this year went through this process last year. They are saying, "Can't we do some more work with that? We like that better than what we're doing here." And that's an eye-opener, because at first they had felt it was a lot of work.

I should say that social studies has always been my favorite subject, and also, when the teacher is super-enthusiastic about trying something new, and I was, that comes out.

NWREL: Would you say that some of your enthusiasm came from the depth of involvement that you had in the process that ultimately resulted in selection of this?

K: I think we felt that we were learning new things with the children, and that's exciting. I mean, if you teach, you also love to learn. That's what I like about teaching a multiage class; I can't be doing

the same thing every year. It's more work, but I would rather do new things every year.

W: You also have time to sit and talk to each other and get ideas from each other, and that was the most effective part of the meeting [the spring 1997 open house on the sixth-grade social studies curriculum]. When I came in the middle of it, I sat and just listened to them share about their own experiences and watch each other grow and hone each other's skills. I think that was an important part of it too.

The teachers talked about the importance of opportunities to work together in learning a new curriculum.

D: I do think teachers need some time to work together, which administrators have to support. Otherwise, teachers might get frustrated.

M: When one of us would be frustrated, somebody else would provide a suggestion, and then the light would go on. So we didn't feel like we were in isolation but we were a team.

B: And I feel that isolation is probably a good word for how some of the teachers just now working with the curriculum feel. They are scared, and some of them are angry. But because of our experience with the curriculum, this group is tight.

The experience really supported the group, so that when the original sixth-grade team had an open house for their peers last year, and they all brought samples from their own classroom, they weren't the least bit embarrassed to bring their own stuff and show it off because they knew that it had been honed by each other. It was a time of celebration.

The group discussed a resource, developed by them and compiled by Merrilou, to help teachers link the state and district essential learnings, guiding questions, and the adopted text. It was passed out at the fall open house and also made available to all sixth-grade teachers.

K: I am curious to know if people are using it, because we put a lot of time into that. If I were new and had looked at that, it would have immediately brought my stress level down because it was all planned out. It explains the topics in the book that need to be covered, lists the pages that cover those topics, notes the skills that need to be addressed, and suggests plans for accomplishing it all. Or are people feeling that we're telling them this is what you have to do?

W: My colleagues were intimidated when they saw this, and they came to me and said, "How do we handle this? What do we do?" So I spent two hours with them before the school year started. When they saw the structure and what the program had to offer, and the

way we tried to present this curriculum with choices and make it nonthreatening, they were more encouraged.

The open house that we had was all choices: They could come, they could partake, they could look at what they wanted to look at, they could borrow what they wanted to borrow, they could come if they wanted to come, it was not us dictating things to them. When we sat down last year, we went from the curriculum to approaches. We said, well, you can do it thematically going according to geographical area, and you might want to teach it thematically according to different types of learning styles. Or you can teach it chronologically, that is, you can do strictly the text. So it lent itself to many different teaching styles and made it inviting to my colleagues, and I think to all the teachers. A key feature of presenting this to teachers was letting them see that these are the higher level concepts that we are after, these are the learning targets that we're after, this is subject material, the pages that need to be covered, here's all the true ways that you can teach it if you choose to, and boy did that relieve people.

M: Once they see that, it makes such a big difference.

D: And you know if it were just this [the new social studies curriculum], I think that meeting would have been okay. But there are a lot of changes coming down on teachers. There's some fear about having to do the writing assessments and the reading assessments and other new things.

M: A focus on not just solving math problems, but being able to explain the process, for example.

K: And site management at the schools at the same time.

D: So it's everything at once. I think that we did our social studies inservice in as friendly a way as we possibly could, given this.

NWREL: Talk some about how you're conscious of having made some changes; I mean it's one thing to be open to change, but you've really embraced it.

K: I think one of the shifts is in our approach to history. In the past the way we'd deliver information was, for example, to say, here's the Civil War and this is what caused it. Now we say, let's study this event and this event and this event. What was the common strand here; are there similar causes? What is driving this? And it takes a lot more orchestration to do that. The manual helps you get to that point, but you've got to be thinking about that constantly. I think that's a shift for people, one that takes their comfort zone and kind of whacks it, because you do have to do more long-range planning.

It's not just the Civil War here. Also, one thing kind of leads into the next, so you have to be very careful how you present everything.

NWREL: So for you does that mean a different way of planning?

W: Definitely. Even though I know what's right and know what has to happen for the kids to learn—knowing that I've got to have the kids do a lot more exploration on their own and a lot more work in discussion groups—it's harder to run a classroom that way.

K: And if you were a control freak and wanted an absolutely quiet room, this wouldn't be for you.

W: That reminds me of an example I used with the parents, so they could embrace the new curriculum changes and the methodologies, and see how it works in the classroom. I coached basketball last year with another sixth-grade colleague; the experience provided a model in another setting of what happens in the classroom. We opted to coach basketball with the kids sitting around receiving direct instruction the majority of the time. We'd talk about something, run through drills, and then we'd go on to the next drill. It was so much easier, the kids were so good and they sat there listening to us. But then we put them in the game and it was appalling how there was absolutely no carryover.

It is much easier, so much easier, to teach the traditional lecture format, but you have to let go. I'm standing back to see how some of my colleagues embrace that, because it takes you into less of a comfort zone. It's just harder to know what everyone is doing, but you know it's the right thing to do.

It shocked us; we realized should have had them scrimmaging, putting those skills to work in a meaningful context from the get-go. To me, that is an absolute direct parallel to what's got to happen for learning to take place in the classroom. The integration and the application of the skills is vital; you can't just throw the ball out and say, "Play." There has to be structure, but it's guided structure. You're standing back as a facilitator and letting them make the discoveries. We have the structure, and then the methodology is to get them out there playing.

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NWREL: So then how do you explain this stance to people who might expect you to be perfectly knowledgeable about what's going to happen today, tomorrow, and the next day in your classroom? What are the reasons for being a facilitator and somewhat out of your comfort zone as a teacher?

K: You need to take a look at the guiding question and then start looking at the activities. You may see that a certain activity doesn't get them where you want them to go. I mean it's a nice, fun little activity, and it's beautiful and it would look great in their portfolios, but does it get them to be able to answer that guiding question? If it doesn't, it's gone. And, from a planning point of view, you always have to have that guiding question in mind because if it doesn't lead you up to that, then what's the point of doing it?

NWREL: For the other sixth-grade teachers who haven't had this year of conversation, of refining and understanding the guiding questions, how do you get them to the point of knowing which activities are going to be important and which ones aren't?

K: Just as we did, they need to work together in a group that feels real safe, agreeing to look at a guiding question, divide up the parts, and see which activities will get you to the goal, not necessarily the most quickly, because not everything is a matter of speed. That's what we did, and I think that's why we felt so comfortable running with it, because we were given a chance to do that. And how many times have I said, "Wait a minute; this doesn't make sense to me." Then I'd listen to Warren or I'd listen to you or to you and we'd all put our own interpretation on it and feel we understood it. Then it became real; it wasn't just something in this book. I think it's important for administrators in the building to see the value of teachers helping each other understand these new ways of working.

I think it's important for administrators in the building to see the value of teachers helping each other understand these new ways of working.

W: And keeping an eye on the end product. With the strong accountability built in, I think when people see what's working and what's not, how students are doing with the performance-based tests and so forth, that's going to be a terrific validation of they way you are going to teach.

D: I've gotten to the point where I'm saying to myself, "Is this activity going to get them to the point where they can answer a specific question like, 'How were the colonists the same and different? Compare and contrast their dealings with another group'." If a certain activity does nothing to get them to that point, I'm not going to

use it. So I'm tossing things right and left that I used to do in fifth grade, but now I've got a different mind-set and I'm throwing things by the wayside because I'm figuring, well, I've done that and that's really neat and the kids like it, but it's not getting to the same degree of meat that they were used to last year.

W: It's really quite interesting how we want to still be in that comfort zone, though. Another teacher recently told me he was ready to get into the themes of geography, so he'd spent the last few weeks doing latitude and longitude. I felt like he couldn't launch himself into the deep end, you know; he had to take the baby steps in the shallow end and kind of ease his way into it. He needed to be in that comfort zone.

NWREL: But then if you think of big ideas in geography, for instance, where and how would you deal with latitude and longitude in this curriculum?

W: Well, there are five themes in geography and then there are guiding questions for the whole curriculum. What he was doing was teaching map skills per se.

NWREL: As if they were isolated and should be pretaught.

W: I myself spent a couple weeks at the outset talking about world geography terms, but within the context of saying that there are locations that we are going to be mentioning a lot and it's going to be very helpful to know them. But I just wanted to give them the word that these places will be referred to all the time. I wanted students to know where these places are. I deemed this important because I didn't want to be stopped and have them stop trying to figure something out that was an important key historical concept because they didn't know where they were. But this isn't the same as doing the old map skills thing. To answer your question, I'd teach latitude and longitude where students need to know them, in some study where latitude and longitude play a role.

B: And, like today, we're studying Greece. I have a blank map. I asked students what we should put on it. Of course, somebody put the capitol and some other features. And then somebody just brought up latitude and longitude. It's in math, it's in science, it's integration. It's liking averaging in math; I do it now during science because I believe it's in the weather kit. Why wait until averaging comes up in the math book? When you're averaging for your weather, do it when that kit comes in the fall.

D: And there's a real need to learn how to do it at that point.

W: But it has to fit, there has to be a reason for the student learning it. Do I want students to be able to analyze a current political event, for example, why the Jews feel compelled to build in the Palestinian area, and what historical things are behind that, and what does this tell us about population movement? Do I want them to understand that, or do I want them to know latitude and longitude? Well, it's not a very difficult call, and that's my comeback all the time.

NWREL: So that brings up the topic of the criteria you use in deciding what you spend time on in the classroom. You are saying that what you spend time on in the classroom are the bigger issues and activities and interactions that move kids toward that. But how do you deal with parents and others in the community who feel well served by the factual emphasis in their own education and want to know why their favorite book or fact or whatever is not being emphasized?

W: And not only do the parents do that, look at [E. D.] Hirsch coming out several years ago with *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, saying you cannot graduate youngsters who do not know this and this and this to the point of publishing a book for each grade level next.

Actually we dealt with that issue a little bit. Are there, in terms of continuity, key things that we must make sure are covered as a foundation for the next level? So, you know, that's why we have the sixth-grade world history base, and in the seventh grade it's the geography base, and then eighth and ninth grade are doing their pieces. We network the information somewhere along the lines, but this does not answer entirely that question of what everyone needs to know to graduate.

K: And we also talked a lot about how what's important is not so much what you teach them as the processes that you're teaching them, because if you teach them the processes well, when they get to something they don't know, they're going to know how to get that knowledge. They're going to know where to go, how to get there, how to organize their thought, how to graphically organize what they need to find out. You can get the kids to do that; it doesn't matter whether you teach Australia or you teach Japan, you're teaching the processes, not one piece of information.

NWREL: So would you say that your notion of curriculum is more organized around particular processes of learning than content of learning?

ALL: Yes, mine is.

W: Do you all find that parents are now closer to accepting change in education? I sense less resistance.

NWREL: Less resistance to the curriculum changing?

K: Parents are asking a lot more questions than they used to, and the questions are changing. Instead of asking generally, "Why are you teaching this?" they want to know, "What do you hope to accomplish by teaching this?" And you better have a real good answer to that, more than, "Oh well, I just decided that I wanted to do that." And that's a hard switch for the teachers who haven't gone through the processes you all have. That can be a threatening question.

M: I think after the experience that I've had, that teachers coming out of teacher preparation should have some experience in doing this [planning and learning curriculum firsthand]. I feel that in the past three years I've done so much.

NWREL: What would you urge teacher educators to incorporate in the apprenticeship or the training of the teachers?

M: The fact that we all worked together so well had a lot to do with the value of this experience for me. I think the chemistry of this group worked really well. Still, I think that it is important to go through those processes of looking inward and asking, "Why are we doing this? Why do we do this in seventh grade? Are we doing this because we've always done it or because it's good for kids?" We asked these questions over and over again throughout the last three years, and while a lot of the changes were driven by the state, we weren't just looking at that. We were looking at a bigger picture of whether we could justify what we were going to do as a district. That was just as important as what the state was requiring. For example, we really grappled with writing benchmarks for economics that would appropriately link the practical and the theoretical learnings and would fit with the varying experiences kids bring to school. We have a lot of economic and cultural diversity in our district.

"Why are we doing this? Why do we do this in seventh grade? Are we doing this because we've always done it or because it's good for kids?"

NWREL: So, in your situation, you have these guiding questions that frame what all the students are learning. But still there are decisions you make about content and learning experiences based on the needs and experiences of the children with whom you're working, right?

W: I probably don't have as much difficulty because my students may be beneficiaries of more experiences, but Kim [a teacher in a high-poverty school] has to be much more judicious about what she decides she is going to go over with them, what will have meaning in their lives.

K: Or you may just have to give them a little bit of background to get them to the same page as everybody else.

NWREL: And so in a way that brings up a point that you started with early on about how the equity concern was raised. Are you feeling that this is a strong theme that the teachers work with in this curriculum?

W: The equity strand is important in both the guiding questions and the selection of the text. I can't speak for other teachers, but I know what guides my thinking, because when I see us get into an area that has been traditionally taught Eurocentrically, it is nice to point things out from a different perspective. For instance, at the June inservice we did a sample lesson from Chinese history about the feudal system. I asked teachers where students associate ideas about kings, queens, castles, etc. They said the Middle Ages in Europe, but I made the point that this system was established 200 years earlier in China. So teachers can think about this and see how this information lends itself to equity by opening kids' eyes to this knowledge.

> All children can learn, and I'd add, all teachers can learn, and we can do some changing.

NWREL: Let me shift to the impact of this curriculum development and implementation experience on you as teachers. Would you say that your beliefs about learning have been affected?

K: Definitely. If anything, it's convinced me more and more that all kids can learn. I can expect all kids to learn, but I have to do the road work, put the energy into it. Choosing something like this curriculum that makes it easier to help kids learn, with many options and different kinds of activities, I found a lot more success, even with kids who couldn't read the book. I felt like they had gotten the same amount of information, even though they might give it out differently than maybe the kids who are worked with at home and whose parents have computers at home. I really felt like this curriculum was an equalizer. That everybody was on the same page and everybody was leaving my classroom with the same information, whereas before it wasn't that way.

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NWREL: So choice is one important factor for you in terms of successful learning. The kids need options. Are there other things that have struck you?

D: As Kat said, all children can learn, and I'd add, all teachers can learn, and we can do some changing. It may take us a little longer and we may have to work hard to learn to think differently about the curriculum. I sometimes have to stop myself and say, "Whoops, there I go. I'm falling back into old ways of working." In math I've always done lots of problem solving, which is critical thinking, but now I have to switch gears and start thinking about doing it in other areas. I have to focus on that.

Yes, I have to work in a different way, and believe me, if I can work in a different way, I think every person can.

K: It's the thinking part of it that is different: You know, all of us have certain habits, certain things that we do. For 29 years I've tried different methods, and the ones I liked, felt comfortable with, I kept. The other ones I didn't. And so what I'm trying to do now is to try something new—to keep things that aren't comfortable and keep working with them. And I think that's what a lot of teachers have to know, that it's not going to be easy, it's going to take concentration and focus and some planning and looking back—for example, to see what I just missed that could have been wonderful for cause and effect. Okay, I'll stick that in the next time around. I've been doing this job for 29 years, and right now, teaching is not a clear, set pattern like it used to be.

B: I've taught in four different states and in another country, so I've made changes, so many adjustments. I also made a conscious decision when I started teaching. I saw teachers who never made any change at all; they went into room 12 and 30 years later they came out of room 12. I begged another teacher there to switch grade levels with me for the year, "Oh no, I've always taught third grade, I couldn't possibly change." It was just so threatening for her, and I told myself, "As God is my witness I will never be like that. I will make changes." And I've had opportunities to do that, not ones I've always sought out, but....

K: I think most teachers will try a change in a small area.

NWREL: So what about the parallel to the kids and pushing the limits of their comfort zone?

K: I am seeing how this is a problem for some kids. This year, I have for the first time four kids in my classroom who were in a more traditional classroom last year in our building. Now they're in my

multiage as the older kids, and they're looking at me as if to say, "Who are you and what planet are you from? We've always done our spelling tests like so, and we've always done this, and what do you mean decide whether this paper goes in the social studies file or in reading? No, no, no, no, no—you tell me what to do and I'll do it. Don't give me those choices...." I've had to recognize that this is okay; it's a different style. But they're resistant.

NWREL: But can they learn? Can they learn to be more willing to work on the edge like you are?

K: They can. It's going to take some time, but I think they can learn.

NWREL: So this curriculum is not only asking teachers to rethink how they work, but it's asking kids to be willing to work in new ways too, right?

W: To evaluate their work and analyze their work in a totally new context, absolutely.

NWREL: Kat, you mentioned earlier the kids who are not strong readers or have special needs are actually feeling carried along because of all the supports that are here, and you like that. Are there other kids who are having difficulties with this approach that is driven by big guiding questions?

W: Sure, sure, kids who are concrete, sequential thinkers.

D: That's their personality—that may not have anything to do with the teacher or the class they came from.

NWREL: Are you finding any successes with helping such kids become more conceptually comfortable?

W: Well, actually I don't think that the classic, traditional student is any further away from where you want him or her to be than the student who is so expansive with her thinking that she needs to be brought back to base to organize her thoughts. So I think both are teachable and, yes, to answer your question, I think both can definitely expand their current ways of thinking, through being shown possibilities, brainstorming, and mapping out methods to do this.

NWREL: Another point you made earlier, Warren, was that students understand the criteria by which their work will be judged and learn to self-assess. Dana, you mentioned writing. Will you talk a little bit about why writing is important in this?

D: Well, I always tell children unless you can write it, how does anyone know that you know the material? Because, for example, at an interview, you won't be able to just talk your way through, you're going to have to write what you mean, how you feel, and so forth. And so I think the writing, the thinking part and the writing part have to go together. And that's changing what assessments look like.

B: We're doing math writing, we're doing writing in every subject for assessment now.

D: I think we got away from writing for a long time, major pieces of writing. I think the kids have always been writing some great stories. But stories were to a point where, for awhile, it didn't matter how they spelled or structured the work as long they were creative. Now we're saying yes, it does matter. It does matter what the writing looks like, and that's being said in all the content areas.

> It was being on that journey with colleagues whom I respect that was very satisfying.

W: To me it's a high level of thinking activity to be able to organize your thoughts in a written or verbal form, and of course it's written because that's the easiest way to massively assess.

B: But you can do it in different ways. You can do it with diagrams; you can do it with flow charts. There are lots of ways of putting down the information, and students need to learn all of those ways. You need to be able to organize and then make a statement from the organizers, and that's another thing that is important about this book, don't you think? Organizers that are in it?

NWREL: And I gather there are particular ways of reading and thinking that you have identified as important enough that they cut across all the areas. For instance, you mentioned earlier, Dana, cause and effect. It sounds like you feel that there's a shared understanding among teachers using this curriculum of the kinds of thinking, reading, and writing strategies that kids need to be developing and that therefore you need to be teaching.

I would like to conclude by asking you to talk about what has been the most professionally satisfying aspect of this experience for each of you? It's clear that it has not always been a cakewalk—it was hard work—but what was the best thing about your involvement in the sixth-grade social studies curriculum piece?

D: I think for me it was meeting with new people and learning new things from them. I think that's been the most exciting, and then being able to take back some of their ideas and feelings and use them.

K: I think one of the most validating parts for me was the point when we had done all the roadwork and we started looking to see what materials would fit, and we found something that was almost as if we had written it ourselves: I said to myself, we are on the right track. Even though it took us a long time to get there, we were on the track. And along the way we deviated every once in a while, but that was a real high point.

B: And I guess I'm going to parrot that, even though I didn't get on the train at the same time as the other people in the group, just entering the train halfway down the track, the journey—it was being on that journey with colleagues whom I respect that was very satisfying. And I like trying new things and going new places. I had never been to Egypt; now I've been to Egypt, and now I love history, and so it's been a great journey.

W: The most emotional, the most gratifying thing for me is seeing the big picture—making the connection between outside of the classroom and the curriculum. Also, being able to step outside of the classroom and see how the whole thing is put together. Something that is a nationwide concern, set up by the state for itself, and then how that's put together and eventually trickles down to your own classroom. Putting the whole thing together has been an eye-opener for me and very gratifying seeing the whole process. And then, echoing what Kat was saying, that knowing—having felt subtly or intuitively for a long time as to what worked and what was good and what didn't work but not knowing if I was right, getting that sense of validation, like you said when you saw the textbook work, that sense of validation that, because some of these notions I've had are, are what we need to be doing. It's been nice to be validated in that regard. Very satisfying.

D: We don't have to feel guilty about being facilitators anymore.

Caution: Women at Work

Margaret Marsh and Linda Kidd

As two veteran teachers with more than 52 years experience between us, we have come to the teaching profession via very different routes. Even though we traveled separate roads, our beliefs about curriculum, how children learn, and best practices are quite similar. Shared experiences these last few years teaching at the same elementary school have had a lasting impact on our lives as teachers in general and our thinking about curriculum in particular. We have gradually developed a set of shared beliefs that guide our daily practice:

- First and foremost, the child is at the center of our vision. All that we do, and all that we hope to do, centers around this child. We cannot divert our attention to the politics of education or policies that are forever changing. The child must remain our focus.

- All children can learn. If children do not learn, it is the teacher's responsibility to make careful observations and course corrections to ensure that real, authentic learning takes place for that child.

- Good teaching hinges on building on a child's strengths. Children come to us with a wealth of previous learning. Our task is to take the child from the known to the unknown.

- Understandings about best practices do not stand alone but are part and parcel of everything that we do as teachers.

- Assessment is authentic and on-going. Testing and benchmarks and state standards have a place, but they need to be placed in the context of a broad and rich approach to assessment. The curriculum must drive the assessment rather than the assessment drive the curriculum.

- The joy of learning is the fuel that will power a child's investigations even when there are roadblocks and challenges.

Margaret's Story

My decision to become a teacher can be traced to a couple of major influences. One of my mother's legacies was her insistence that I be able to support myself. Mother was not an educated woman, in the traditional sense, but she knew education was a ticket to freedom. This insight stemmed from a life of struggle and frustration as she grappled with raising two children single-handedly. Her passion for my education led to my independence and escape from poverty. Fifty years later I still remember teachers like Violet Thompson and Edna Littlefield. They taught me more than short vowel sounds and the diagramming of sentences. They taught me to believe in myself and my abilities. For me, schools were an all-important leveling field, and it comes as no surprise that my life's path led me to become a teacher.

The first few years of teaching were as overwhelming for me as they are for every new teacher. Although I had been well prepared formally through my college courses, education practicums, and student-teaching experience, I was not ready for the reality of being totally responsible for my own classroom. I secretly hoped no one would notice that I did not have a clue about what I was doing. I struggled with management. My students could not learn if I couldn't get them to listen and cooperate. Not only did I have 28 students to manage, I had a curriculum to manage. What was I expected to teach? What was the most effective way to present material? I grappled alone with these questions in my classroom in a difficult inner- city school. During that first year I very seriously thought about abandoning the profession, but thanks to a few veterans around me, slowly I met with some success. My students and their parents grew to like me. My classes were better behaved and really seemed to be learning. I got positive feedback from colleagues. A master teacher, hardly, but I slowly gained ground and confidence.

> The joy of learning is the fuel that will power a child's investigations even when there are roadblocks and challenges.

Then I transferred to a school in a middle-class neighborhood. Teaching there was easy by comparison. The kids came to school eager and ready to learn. Student management was simple. In those days publishers' texts actually highlighted what the teacher was to say in conducting a reading group. And even more incredibly, we teachers compliantly read it as scripted. Workbooks, a lot of not very meaningful busywork, and the "good old days" prevailed. But, for the most part, these kids learned to read. I am not sure why, but many even "loved" to read. There were some kids who found reading difficult and really struggled. But no method has ever been 100 percent successful. In this school I became an exemplary teacher. I

got a lot of parent requests. I was a success! There were always challenging kids, and I seemed to be successful with them, but as I look back perhaps it became too routine.

After 13 years in the profession, I yearned to explore something else. I was not sure what I was seeking, but I left my position at Portland Public Schools and dove into the business world. It was exhilarating. I did not make my fortune or discover my "true niche" in life. I did learn volumes about myself: I was adaptable, I had skills that were valued in another context, I was creative, I could scramble, I could survive adversity—recessions and downsizing. I also learned how critical it was to be passionate and single-minded in pursuit of a goal. The business world afforded me a fresh glimpse of myself. Perhaps it was the experience of something different, a new challenge. I saw young people coming in to apply for jobs who were ill-prepared for work in many respects. I understood with a new clarity what businesspeople were looking for in young employees. I thought about the students I had had in the past and wondered how well I had prepared them for the "real world." They needed the basic skills of reading, written communication, and spelling, as well as dependability, confidence, resiliency, an ability to work with others, a sense of humor, a willingness to learn, and initiative. These are the ingredients for success in any endeavor.

I expected my return to teaching in 1985 to be short-lived, because I thought my true calling was still in the business world. I think back on my first 13 years as a teacher and am unsure that I was much more than adequate. But I came back to the profession a very different person. I was full of confidence. I knew who I was. I liked myself. While on sabbatical I had come into my own. Perhaps the cosmic powers were also in alignment, because I returned to a profession that was exploding with new and exciting knowledge.

I became immediately immersed in and excited by the work of Donald Graves. Teaching writing as a process was emerging. Asking students to think about and write about their own ideas—how radical! In the good old days we had students copy poetry from the board or do language experience stories we had composed together. That was considered "writing." After completing my first year back, I participated in the Oregon Writing Project. I learned how much thinking goes on when you write, and how often you arrive at a different destination than the one you planned. For the first time I realized how very important it was to get kids to write. Writing is reading, writing is thinking. Writing is about self-knowledge. Teaching writing requires a skilled teacher coaching kids to become excited about writing, getting kids writing about meaningful "stuff" in their lives, and asking them to think about their writing and what it means. It required all the risk-taking and confidence that I had dis-

covered in myself during my leave. I was becoming a different kind of teacher. I entered a master's program at Portland State University. I couldn't learn enough. I devoured new research about how kids learn and was particularly interested in how young children learn to read. I thought a lot about myself as a learner and how I learned. I knew I had "come home," and I knew it was where I belonged.

Enter center stage: a new principal and a remarkable woman, Mary Beth Van Cleave. She understood the learning process in her bones—like no one I had ever encountered—and she cared passionately about the children. She was *not* interested in "playing it safe" or in the mediocrity that that course breeds. She was a visionary. She dreamed dreams that we had never dared to dream and was tenacious in finding ways to bring her dreams into reality. She was gifted in enlisting us to make those dreams come true. She challenged us to consider new research, she asked questions about our familiar classroom practice, she encouraged and nudged us to try new approaches to reach students.

Under her leadership I had permission and encouragement to embark on my own learning quest, to risk, to dare. Because of her inspiration I stretched myself even further. I read voraciously, and attended as many classes and conferences as I could manage. I immersed myself in learning all I could about how children learn. I became a true reflective practitioner. I sought out like-minded colleagues, and we discussed issues at length and shared ideas.

The effect her leadership had on my own learning spilled over into my classroom. I found myself rethinking how children develop literacy, I explored cooperative learning, and I began to use class meetings with my students. I asked more questions, invited students to embark on their own learning quest, and gave them the permission and encouragement that I had received. I tried to be sure that I asked students to engage in meaningful work. I reexamined my role as the teacher and strove to be more of a facilitator and less of a fountain of knowledge.

Like any grand experiment, I got it wrong almost as often as I got it right, but gradually I became a different, better teacher. I had begun to understand the kind of scaffolding that children need in order to become successful learners. Not only do they need support and encouragement, they sometimes need redirection. They also often need tremendous motivation and reassurance to even embark on the journey.

Along with my sustained, close relationship with my principal, other educators whom I knew from a distance greatly influenced my development as a teacher. I learned the importance of learning together cooperatively from the writing and presentations of Spencer Kagan.

I was immersed in the work of Dr. Marie Clay during one year of Reading Recovery® training. That year reshaped many of my notions about how young children learn to read. I had unconsciously accepted the idea that children learn to read in a sequential order, i.e., part to whole. Reading Recovery® allowed me to step back and really observe kids as they put the reading process together. Each one was unique and did it a little differently. I really learned to value the importance of multiple reading strategies. I could see how good readers orchestrated all the strategies to make meaning and how poor readers tended to rely on one strategy and were lost at the point of difficulty if that strategy failed them. I saw how some readers used writing to get to reading. I witnessed those connections being made. I had had so few of the answers!

The work of Regie Routman, as described in her two books, *Transitions* and *Invitations*, was also a critical influence. Regie has tremendous respect for the child and always reminds us that what we ask children to do must be meaningful. She stresses the importance of being models for children. The book *Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelson and the work of H. Stephen Glenn introduced me to the class-meeting process. I was foolish or desperate enough to try it. The result, slow in coming, amounted to a small miracle: The most contentious class of my career turned into a strong, cohesive group.

Regie Routman, Jane Nelson, and H. Stephen Glenn focused and deepened my thinking about classrooms as communities and brought unmistakable clarity to the relationship between literacy and community. The work of Ernest Boyer, in *The Basic School: A Community for Learning*, gave me a sense of the big picture. It has had an important impact on my thinking and teaching. I first heard Ernest Boyer at an National Council of Teachers of English conference many years ago. I was in an audience of thousands and could barely make out the rather ordinary-looking man at the podium, but I was deeply moved by him and by his message. Strange how you can tell when someone "knows" what it's all about. This man chose his words so precisely. He did not waste language. In *The Basic School,* Boyer eloquently describes the four priorities for an effective elementary school. He recommends a framework consisting of the "four Cs": a Community for learning, a Curriculum with coherence, a Climate for learning, and a Commitment to character. Perhaps Boyer's major contribution to thinking about schools was his ability to see the significance of connections. He believes that being a truly educated person means being guided by values and beliefs and connecting the lessons of the classroom to the realities of life.

> I had begun to understand the kind of scaffolding that children need in order to become successful learners.

I realize I entered teaching to fulfill my mother's wish that I make my own way in the world, but for me a larger purpose has always been to "make a difference." Teaching has been my vehicle for doing that. Teaching has also given me a very special gift. To be a good teacher, first and foremost, you must be a learner. Teaching has been a means of continuing to grow and learn personally and professionally. It is never done.

> I love to teach as a painter loves to paint, as a musician loves to play, as a singer loves to sing, as a strong man rejoices to run a race. Teaching is an art—an art so great and so difficult to master that a man or woman can spend a long life at it, without realizing much more than his limitations and mistakes and his distances from the ideal.
>
> —William Phelps

Linda's Story

Except for the brief time that I spent wanting to be a cowgirl and ride off into the sunset with Roy Rogers, I have always wanted to be a teacher. One of my early experiences that I consider to be a turning point was in the second grade. Mrs. Byers was my teacher, and what stands out for me, other than the time I was sent out to the hall for talking when this time I truly wasn't, were the times that she let me be her assistant and listen to other reading groups read. Her confidence in my ability was powerful! I loved the spotlight, and it was then that I thought ... I can do this! I want to be a teacher! Also, by this time I was old enough to figure out that Roy Rogers already had Dale Evans, and at least I would have something to fall back on if the "cowgirl thing" didn't work out.

Childhood held many other adventures into the world of teaching, from turning a simple garage into a classroom in nothing flat, to running a day care one summer in my friend's basement. (We charged 35 cents a day per child for two hours of care!) I guess you'd have to say that I was programmed at a pretty early age to fall in love with teaching. It was rewarding, people thought I was good at it and had confidence in me, and I was paid handsomely! What more could I ask for?

Fast-forward now some 30 years. It was just an everyday conversation. I was sitting in the office of my principal when, out of the blue, she said that she would like to talk to me sometime about my personal philosophy of education. Well, the thoughts that ran through my head were amazing. Did I even have a personal philosophy? I'm sure

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there was one in there somewhere, but I had never before given it a voice. Looking back, I know I valued individual differences, personal effort, and a positive attitude. I had a pretty good intuition and related well to people. What I didn't have was a well-defined philosophy.

Out loud I heard myself say something like, "Sure, anytime is fine," but inside my head I was saying things like, "You'd better come up with something! I wonder why she wants to know. Did I do something wrong?" That single request has probably been the most important turning point in my career. Since that time other events have helped to shape my philosophy, and after each experience I have remembered that afternoon's conversation.

One such experience was my Reading Recovery® training. I used to think that I knew how to teach reading. I had had a pretty good methods professor in college, followed by 20 years of experience. In addition, I had been trained in Project Read and DISTAR. I was ready to meet the challenges of a Special Education population of low-achieving readers! Teaching reading for me centered on a phonetic approach. I believed then that a child's number one strategy needed to be "sound it out." Reading for meaning was something you did later, after you had cracked the code.

My year of Reading Recovery® training turned everything that I knew about teaching reading upside down, and forced me to think in new ways. I learned to observe children, focusing on their strengths and abilities rather than on what they couldn't do. I learned the wisdom of asking questions such as "Does that sound right? Does it make sense?" in order to help children read for meaning. I began to realize that all children bring a wealth of previous knowledge to the text at hand, and my job was to help them orchestrate what they knew. I observed these amazing first-graders as they learned to monitor their own reading, build a bank of strategies that they could draw on at points of difficulty, and learn how words work both in reading and writing. These children became my best teachers.

> Except for the brief time that I spent wanting to be a cowgirl and ride off into the sunset with Roy Rogers, I have always wanted to be a teacher.

My Reading Recovery® training changed for all time how I think about children and their literacy development. And when Kelly School was accepted as one of only 16 schools in the nation to implement the framework of a Basic School, my philosophy of what a school community means expanded in ways that I never could have imagined. Using Ernest Boyer's book and his four Cs (described earlier by Margaret) as our focus, the staff participated in study groups in which we discussed the ideas, applied them to our own teaching

lives, and slowly but surely came to a shared vision of what a school should be like. The journey toward that vision has had a few bumps and turns, but the process has been inspiring. We find ourselves talking the same language, working as teams of committed professionals, creating an environment for learning that places the child at the center of the discussion. The passion that we feel about this task can best be summed up in a quote from the Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral:

> Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, his mind is being developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today.

The person who was the catalyst for this personal journey is my mentor, my former principal, and my friend, Mary Beth Van Cleave. She is the person who caused me to give a voice to my personal philosophy, she is the person who encouraged me to be trained in Reading Recovery®, and she is the person who is directly responsible for our connection to the Basic School. As a mentor she asked questions, lots of them, and those questions have caused me to think in new ways.

My ideas have been revised, tweaked, and in some cases turned upside down. I have been encouraged, invited, and sometimes prodded in an environment that celebrated learning not only for the children, but also for the adults. But through this exciting and sometimes frustrating process, my understanding of myself as a teacher has broadened and deepened. I used to depend on what I call the "teachers guide" approach, where the details were left up to someone else. I now see myself in the driver's seat: The teaching decisions are mine and are based on a set of principles that I believe in, not only with my mind but with my heart as well. As we embarked on our quest to become a Basic School, one quote summed up for me my job as a teacher. Abraham Heschel wrote "... And above all, remember that the meaning of life is to build a life as if it were a work of art." In the Basic School, the task is to help each child build a life as if it were a work of art.

A Final Word From Both of Us

The belief statements at the opening of this essay have grown out of our lifetimes of teaching experiences. They have been influenced not only by the children with whom we work, but by our colleagues and school families as well. For us, teaching is, and always should be, a work in progress. It reminds us of the child embarking on a long car trek who asks, "Are we there yet?" The answer is, "Not quite, but soon!"

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About the Authors

Some people say that change is the only constant in our lives. Perhaps the trick is to influence and create change that is beneficial to those around us. In education, the underlying belief is that people do affect one another, with the emphasis on adults teaching younger people. In several of these stories, the learning has come from an interactive process among all the individuals in the classroom, with the teachers acting more as interpreters of information and facilitators of new processes. We also see these writers learning to work as team members with their colleagues. Teaching is truly a balancing act of sifting through and keeping the pieces that work well for students in our varied cultures, and of inventing new ways of sharing and exploring knowledge together. This is what reflective teachers do every day.

Where do we go from here? What are the next questions we will ask of one another? What one change would have the most positive impact on our lives and the lives of our students? How many creative ways can we develop to move toward those changes?

These writers represent many more wonderful, dedicated educators who are working with students, parents, and colleagues to improve education for everyone. In the following paragraphs the writers share a bit about themselves. They would welcome contact from fellow practitioners.

Teri Houghton

Teri Houghton has been a language arts teacher for 20 years, including two and a half years in South Australia and 18 years with the Three Rivers School District. She has worked as a writing specialist with language arts curriculum for the past two years and is currently the Curriculum Coordinator for the Grants Pass School District. She has served as a member of the Literacy Division of the State and National New Standards Projects. Other responsibilities include: Scoring Director for the State Writing Assessment scoring site at the Jackson ESD, and member of the State Writing Content Panel and State Reading Content Panel. She can be contacted by e-mail at thoughton@grantspass.k12.or.us, or by phone at (541) 474-5709.

Gail Gilchrist

Gail Gilchrist is a 41-year-old mother of three. She lives in a small rural community on the East Lake Shore of Flathead Lake. She is currently a third-grade teacher at Cherry Valley Elementary School, in a town bordering the South Lake Shore of Flathead Lake, Polson,

Montana. Gail has additional teaching experiences in Title I, fourth grade, and first grade. She loves teaching science, math, and language arts. Gail also loves the outdoors, including camping, hiking, and cross-country skiing. If you would like to contact her about her experiences in curriculum inquiry, she would welcome your e-mail or correspondence at gail@digisys.net, or at 159 Walnut Lane, Bigfork, MT 59911.

Susan Seaman

Susan Seaman is the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for the Moscow, Idaho, School District. She is a doctoral candidate in educational administration. A career highlight was to meet President Clinton as a 1993 Idaho Presidential Awardee in Mathematics. Susan is currently facilitating three in-district initiatives funded by the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation—Quality Schools Consortium, Moscow Staff Development, and Management and Change—in addition to her usual responsibilities. She is co-chair of the Idaho Collaborative and Moscow Task Force for Youth and is active in school-to-work activities. Susan is proud of her family: her husband, a teacher of secondary mathematics; a daughter and two sons, aged 10 through 14. She can be reached at the Moscow School District, 650 North Cleveland, Moscow, Idaho 83843; phone (208) 882-1120; fax (208) 883-4440.

Karen Mitchell

Karen Mitchell retired last May from the Juneau, Alaska, School District after 21 years of service in the elementary grades. During her tenure she served on the language arts and social studies curriculum committees, founded the Juneau Writing Project, chaired the Board of Directors of the Alaska State Writing Consortium, and became a proud member of the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher's Network. She is currently co-president of the Alaska Council of Teachers of English and is teaching education classes at the University of Alaska Southeast, as well as facilitating teacher inservices in the language arts. Most importantly, she developed as a teacher and a learner with her kids. You may contact Karen at karen_mitchell@breadnet.middlebury.edu, or at Box 240642, Douglas, Alaska 99824.

Dana Ault

Dana Ault began teaching for the Spokane School District in 1969. She has worked with students at both ends of the grade spectrum. She started out teaching third-graders, but realized quickly that she enjoyed older students and has been teaching sixth-graders now for 24 years. Dana notes that she still enjoys them, even though she's been gray-haired ever since.

With her husband, Meredith, Dana is restoring an old house they purchased 10 years ago. As she says, like teaching, they may never see the project completed, but each step is a challenge, a change, and a joy.

Barbara Evers

Barbara Evers teaches a fifth- and sixth-grade multiage class in Spokane, Washington. She has taught in various capacities in Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Canada. Like many other teachers, Barb juggles teaching, family, and her hobby/business of antiques. Contact Barb at Audubon School, 2020 W. Carlisle, Spokane, WA 99205, or by e-mail at BKE13@aol.com.

Merrilou Harrison

Merrilou Harrison has been a teacher for 17 years in several school districts. She has taught all 12 grades and loves each one. Merrilou has worked as a school administrator and is currently the K-12 Social Studies and Secondary Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator for Spokane Public Schools. She can be reached by e-mail at merrilouh@sd81.k12.wa.us, or by phone at (509) 358-7242.

Catalina Svoboda

Catalina Svoboda has been teaching since 1980. She has taught Bilingual Education K-6, Special Education K-9, and is currently teaching in a fifth- and sixth-grade multiage classroom. She has three children: Michael, 15, Joseph, 13, and Katrina, 9. Her husband, Mike, is also a teacher, and currently teaches fourth grade. She enjoys music, dance, and the arts, and hopes to be able someday to dedicate more time to writing.

Warren Wheeler

Warren Wheeler is a 45-year-old intermediate-grade teacher who lives with his wife in the small rural community of Nine Mile Falls, just north of Spokane, Washington. For the past 15 years he has taught sixth grade at Woodridge Elementary School in Spokane School District #81. Warren began his career teaching at a Title I school in East Los Angeles, California. In addition to his passion for teaching all subjects within the classroom, he has coordinated schoolwide, activity-based science programs; chaired his school's instructional team and faculty involvement group; and currently serves on the school's site council. Warren can be reached at Woodridge Elementary School, 5100 W. Shawnee, WA 99208; phone (509) 353-5304; e-mail: WarrenW@sd81.k12.wa.us.

Margaret Marsh

Margaret Marsh received a B.A. in Education in 1965 from the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida, and a master's degree from Portland State University in 1991. Margaret taught elementary school in Portland, Oregon, for 13 years, from 1966-1979. She worked in three different elementary schools, teaching primarily second- and fourth-graders. After a six-year break in her teaching career, Margaret returned to elementary education, teaching grades 2, 3 and 4, and 4 and 5. Margaret administered a federal block grant for one year and has served as a Title I Coordinator and a Reading Recovery® Teacher for the last five years. She has worked in middle-class areas and high-poverty schools and is committed to working in the latter. Margaret is frequently asked to make presentations on a variety of topics related to literacy and school reform. If you wish to contact her, please do so through Linda Kidd, Kelly School, 9030 S.E. Cooper, Portland, Oregon, 97266.

Linda Kidd

Linda Kidd began teaching for Portland Public Schools in the fall of 1971. She has a B.S. from Oregon State University in elementary education and an M.S. in Special Education from Portland State University. For 14 years she taught at the high-school level, in a variety of positions within the realm of Special Education. She is currently teaching Reading Recovery® and is a specialist in a combined Title I and Special Education model at Clinton Kelly Elementary School. She serves on the site committee, one of the four Basic School priority committees. She is experienced in planning large conferences surrounding the topic of literacy, and has also given presentations to groups about the Basic School. If you wish to contact her you may do so by contacting the school, or by e-mail: Linda Kidd, Kelly School, 9030 S.E. Cooper, Portland, Oregon, 97266; phone: (503) 916-6350; e-mail: LSK7271@AOL.com.

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